



GREAT BEAR ISLAND

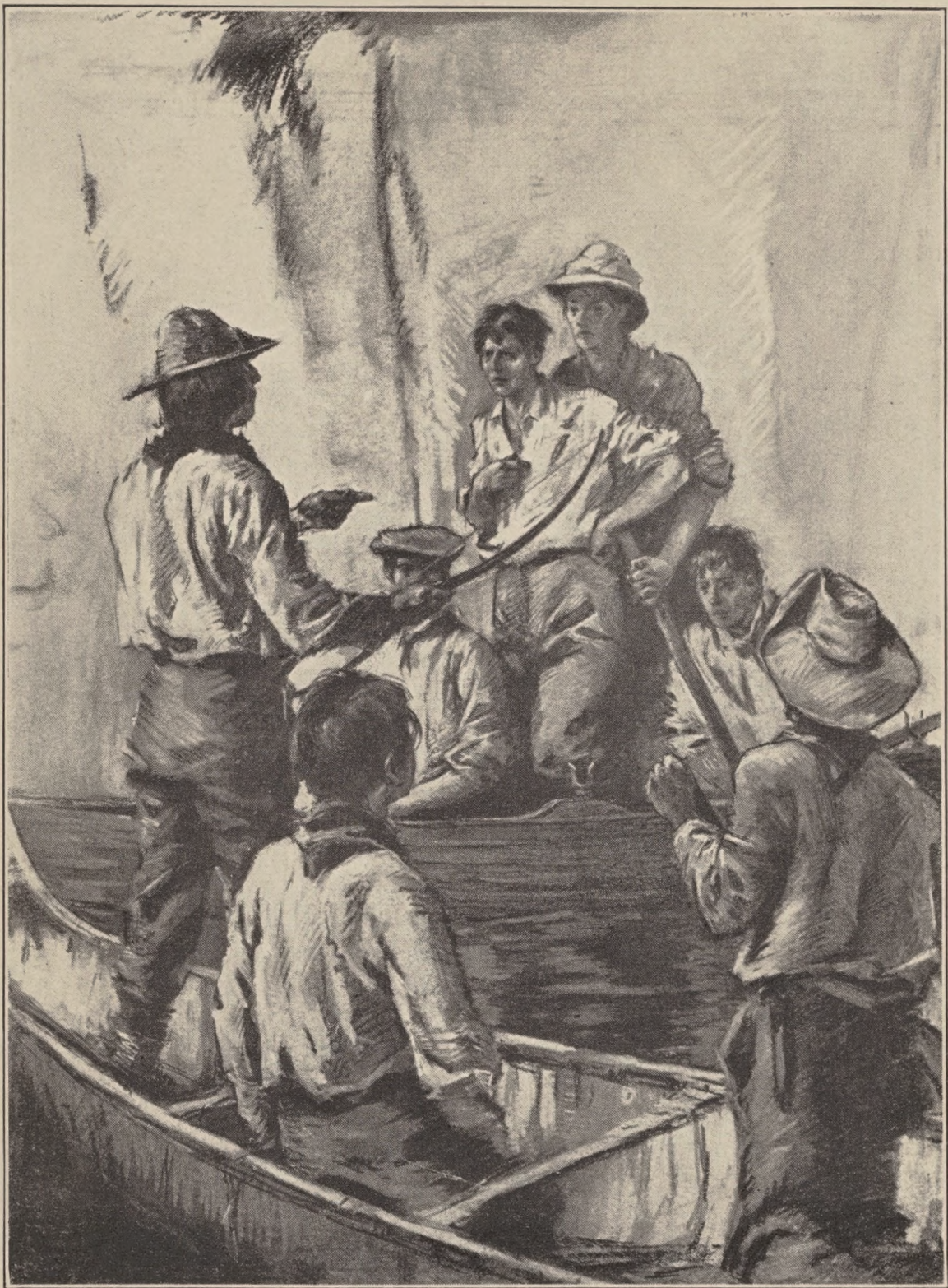
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Great Bear Island



"You wan' one, too?" he asked. FRONTISPIECE. See page 109

TO
THE BEST FELLER I KNOW
AND TO JOHN AND BABE
WHO TAKE AFTER
HER

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Great Bear Island

CHAPTER ONE

MARCHING ORDERS

IT was a warm, close evening in mid-July. In the "Club," Bert, otherwise "Booky," Gordon, sat hunched over that first of Smithsonian publications, *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley*. From time to time he tenderly lifted an axe-head, or rubbing stone, or a little dirt-brown pot from the cabinet beside him, and raptly compared it with one of the yellow old Squier woodcuts.

On the other side of the room Frank Emmett, more familiarly known as "Tools" because of his wholly remarkable ingenuity in using them, was putting varnish stain on a second set of cabinets. He had suspended them from the wall by a device that was one of his latest "little ideas."

G R E A T B E A R I S L A N D

The Club had once been Doctor Gordon's old driving shed. But since Christmas it had been lined with weather-felting and heated by a big box stove. It had been equipped with home-made "gym" mattresses, and furnished from the combined Gordon, Emmett, Tuttle, and Harrison attics and book-shelves. Those Indian relics that "Booky" was once more so fondly classifying came from that never-to-be-forgotten little island mound which the four had discovered on their expedition a hundred miles up the Wantebec River, the summer before. It was a small collection, but there was no other in town that compared with it. And, altogether, the Club was such a combination of gymnasium, library, and museum as should have lifted any four boys on earth to the supreme height of happiness.

It should have. But now, when they knew their river from Mill Bend to Lunge Lake, when they had learned exactly how

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to do things, when they felt in every yearning bone that if only they could get another chance at it they could find mounds and bring back treasure-trove worthy of a Smithsonian Report itself — such a second expedition was the one thing there seemed no prospect of their being able to make for the next five years. It was out of the question for Tools and Booky to go alone, and two weeks ago Bud Tuttle and Jack Harrison had begun their first summer's work in the sugar-beet fields of South Falls.

In the beet fields, too, such days as the present must be simply one long ten hours of baking, sweltering glare. How much more longingly and thirstingly, therefore, would the minds of Bud and Jack go back to the cool woods and waters of the North — to the channel where they used to get the pickerel, to the camp where they had seen the lynx; above all, to the bush-grown little island where they had found that one small mound!

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Booky put down the battered old volume, and again he sighed immeasurably: "Say! Say, Toolsy!"

Tools sighed with him: "Yep, old man?"

"Say, imagine finding something like the Serpent Mound up there!"

"Or Fort Ancient! And, jimmy-o, one night last week I dreamed the four of us had got up there again somehow, and we'd located a mound that you could put a whole town on top of!"

"Gosh, did you! And, say, I've been dreaming about Ninny Noggins again."

"Me, too. I did last week. I guess it's because they've been putting that stuff about him in the *Herald* all the time."

For more than a year Ninny Noggins had been better known as the "wild man." But, three years before, no one had guessed that he was ever to be called by such a name. He had been simply Ninny, the big, shiftless, crazy-witted but always good-natured squatter on Hunter's Point. The

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cruel stupidity that had accused him of starting the great fire of 1910 had so frightened him that he had ended by fleeing, terror-stricken, into the north woods. And there he had become the "wild man." How he had been living during those last three years, no one knew. No tale had come down to Wantebec of what he must have suffered during the three long freezing and starving winters. According to report he had managed to get together some cast-off traps and snares; and with an old bow which he had picked up at the Lunge Lake Reservation he had learned to shoot like a savage. When the boys had encountered him, the summer before, a few miles below the lake, for all his quickness and his tremendous strength, he had seemed almost as inoffensive and as incapable of taking any real care of himself as some great child.

And of late the town had been hearing much of him. Since early June something

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had been leading him to leave the semi-safety of his haunts in the woods. Every week or two he had been making his appearance about the spruce cutters' shanties at Loggers' Inlet. And the spirit of "new journalism" in the *Wantebec Herald* had been seizing upon him as the most attractive of humorous material. Uncle Billy McLeash, who twice a month carried the mail up and down the river, was the innocent provider of the news items in the case. And the *Herald's* smart young man from Detroit worked them up, with the help of one of the town barbers, for his "Saturday Slapsticks."

In the issue of June the twenty-ninth, the story was top-columned of how Jean Baptiste — or "Jombateest" — the shanty cook, had succeeded in feeding Ninny an apple-turnover filled with axle-grease.

The "Slapstick" of the week following was devoted to telling of Ninny's unfortunate adventure with the shanty shotgun

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— “which, as it happened, had just been loaded with peas and salt.” The week after, as told in the *Herald*, another spruce-camp worthy — “Cash-down” Corkery — had celebrated the Fourth by getting “the world’s only genuine, stamped-in-the-bottle wild man” to trade him his entire year’s take of peltries for six boxes of safety matches — that wouldn’t strike.

It was that week, too, that a party of young Indians from the Reservation, “who had been making life interesting for Ninny from the beginning,” had discovered and carried off his store of winter bedding. “And it looked like it might be a hard winter for wild men altogether.”

But not three days later, according to the “Slapsticks,” Ninny had come down and was hanging about Loggers’ Inlet again. This time the gang had got him into an empty shanty, bolted the door, and roared down the chimney at him with a megaphone till he had plunged, yelling,

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through a window, and, as the *Herald's* humorist told it, he "had left a trail of screeches and broken glass and blood behind him, that you could follow half-way round the lake!"

The boys did not read those stories at all. There may have been others who read and laughed at them. But what is certain is that there were at least two old citizens of Wantebec, who, as story followed story, found it gradually more difficult to contain themselves. And when Tools' father, Judge Emmett, read that last one, he contained himself no longer. With the *Herald* broken and crumpled in his hand, he started for Dr. Gordon's, and the doctor, for his part, met him half-way.

"Gordon, have you — have you seen this week's?"

"I've seen it, and my fingers have been itching for my buggy whip ever since!"

"And do you realize, too, why the poor miserable creature *has* been coming back,

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and back, and back to the shanties like this? It's because it was somewhere thereabouts that he met the boys last summer, and was shown the only Christian kindness he's had in the last three years! And now this summer he has some wretched, crack-brained hope of finding them up there again."

"There doesn't seem much doubt of that," said the doctor. "But what can we do, Judge?"

"I made up my mind five minutes ago what we can do. Where are the boys?"

"Do you mean the Four, as they call themselves? Why, Bud Tuttle and Jack Harrison are over at South Falls, working in the beet fields, I think. Your Frank and my Bert are back there in their Club, if they're where they generally are. But I don't just see —"

"Then they'll do very well to begin with," and the judge pushed on furiously down the walk.

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Meanwhile those two younger Argonauts of the Four, still holding down the Club alone, had let their minds go hankering back to that subject of subjects once more.

Again Booky had set down his Indian pot. He had had still another idea. "Say, if *we* hit it for South Falls, too, and all of us put in a month on the beets together, working like sin, too, don't you think that that might get them off for *part* of August, anyway?"

Tools shook his head despondingly. "No, no, I sort of put that proposition up to Dad right when school was closing, but I could tell, all right, that he couldn't see it."

"No, and I guess I know mine wouldn't, either. But, jinks, when you mind that last year you might say that we never really had any idea of the chance we were getting!"

"That's right." And Tools opened Jack's last letter again:

"No use kicking," it read. "This beet

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work is our only chance at another high school term in the fall, and Bud and I are both telling ourselves we're dead lucky to get it."

"They're the real old stuff, all right!"

"They're good enough for me. They wouldn't do any kicking if they had it twice as hard." And then once more, and for perhaps the twentieth time, Tools in his turn treated himself to the hollow pleasures of the imagination.

"But, gosh," he said, "only imagine how it'd feel! Of course I know all right that it couldn't happen — but just supposing it could — imagine how it'd feel if somebody was to come in, right while we're talking now, say, and tell us there was a job that'd start the whole four of us up river next week! — — Who's that? I thought I heard —"

He was further interrupted by the judge's thumping and imperative double knock. And it was followed immediately by the judge in person.

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“We want you boys,” he said, “Jack Harrison and Bud Tuttle along with you, to get ready to go up to Lunge Lake again!”

“And this time,” said the doctor, “we want you to bring Ninny Noggins down with you!”

CHAPTER TWO

UP RIVER!

THE doctor had joined in that most breath-taking of marching orders; but it must be said that so far the judge seemed to be supplying the major part of the confidence.

“But — but we must remember,” said the doctor, “that the sheriff — Hynes, you know — failed when he went up there and tried to get hold of him.”

“That was because Ninny was afraid of him,” said the old man, fiercely. “By this time he’s afraid of any and all of us who are grown up, and with every reason. But he’d know the boys again. You may be sure he hasn’t forgotten that they were good to him before. They could simply stay up there till they got in touch with him — for my part I don’t care if it takes

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all summer — and once they *do*, why, I don't believe they'd have to do much more than make a place for him in the stern of their boat and turn back down-stream!"

"All right. All right. I'm sure I'm heart and soul in favor of their chancing it."

Meanwhile both Tools and Booky still sat speechless. They wanted to be absolutely sure that they were hearing aright. Besides, the judge mightn't know that Bud and Jack were over at South Falls.

But Tools mustered up the courage to tell him now. "They've got a weeding job," he said, "and I think it's going to take them all summer."

"It's going to take them just till I can get word to them over the telephone to-night." The judge snapped it out as if he were taking a bite out of him.

"But," Booky ventured, "they'll need the money. They've got to have it for their fees next fall."

UP RIVER

It was well that Booky's father was there, or he might have had a piece snapped out of him as well. As it was: "Do you think, young man," said the judge, "that we haven't thought about that? I'll see that they don't lose any money by it. I'll provide for the matter of any fees that they'll be needing."

"With my assistance, Judge, with my assistance," the doctor put in, with a little laugh.

"Very good, sir. I'll be very glad to have it. All I know is that I can't stand any more—I've reached the end of *this!*" and twisting that crumped *Herald*, which he still carried like a baton, into a knot, he flung it through the open window.

"Now," he said to Tools, "maybe you can tell me how I can get to your friends by 'phone?"

Tools could tell him very easily. For by this time — the sun was falling low — Bud and Jack would be sitting somewhere

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in the shade of that South Falls boarding-house. Within five minutes he and Booky were speaking to them. And by the end of another five minutes everything was settled!

It was somewhat sobering, of course, to have been given that mission of finding and bringing Ninny back. In one way it was not exactly the same as going up the Wantebec merely to look for prehistoric mounds.

But, as Doctor Gordon pointed out, everything wouldn't be done in a day. It was very unlikely that they would meet with Ninny the first hour they struck camp. To plunge into the bush with the idea of finding him would be craziness. They would simply have to choose the likeliest place, pitch camp, and wait. While they were waiting, whether it was one week or four, there was no reason in the world why they shouldn't hunt for mounds from sun-

UP RIVER

rise till dewy eve, and when they had found Ninny it mightn't be the best wisdom in the world to try to rush back with him at once. Take it altogether, they would very probably have all the time up river that they needed.

"Only remember," he added, "Ninny must always be the first consideration."

They gave him their word for it.

"Another thing, too," said the judge, "those Lunge Lake islands now belong to Major Maggs."

"But we could ask him to let us dig, provided we dug scientifically," argued Booky, a little nervously, "and that's all we'd be digging for."

The judge snorted a bit. But, "Oh, certainly, certainly!" he said.

And for his part, Doctor Gordon went along with them to the major's real estate office and spoke for them.

Major Maggs was Wantebec's "prosperity promoter," but he was a "pro-

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moter" who had never deceived any one but his own unquenchably sanguine self. And at that, too, one lobe of his brain managed to preserve a steady and unlooked-for balance which always kept him in a state of *semi-prosperity*, at least. A few months before — when the promise of car shops for North Wantebec and a furniture factory for Mill Bend had immediately convinced the major that "within five years, sir, or at latest ten, Wantebec would be the Chicago of the state!" — he had at a single sweep projected his eye a hundred miles to the north and bought up the whole tangled and unsurveyed, rock-and-ever-green archipelago in Lunge Lake.

"For on the day when Wantebec does become a second Chicago," he asseverated, "there is one thing that will be an instant crying necessity, and that is, a great summer resort, a really great summer resort within ready access, within ready access of — of any one desiring to go to a summer

resort! There will come a time, gentlemen," (if you allowed the major to talk to you long enough for him to get his hands clutched together under his coat-tails, he always ended by addressing you as "gentlemen") "and it will be here before we realize it, when those Lunge Lake islands will be at once the summer home of Greater Wantebec and the Chautauqua of the North West!"

In the meantime those islands were a Chautauqua with an Indian reservation on one side, and a very un-Chautauqua-like camp of spruce cutters on the other; and the major may have had some secret feeling that if the archipelago was to achieve its manifest destiny "before you realized it," the initial hand of civilization could not be laid upon it too soon. At any rate he not only granted the expedition the broadest charter rights to explore and dig, but he "guaranteed furthermore to bring any discoveries they should make to the attention

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of the proper authorities at Washington. For, without giving you all my reasons for so thinking, gentlemen," he concluded impressively, "it would not in the least surprise me if the small but remarkable mound which you have already located should prove to be the first of further discoveries ranking among the most extraordinary ever made upon this continent."

Two days later Jack and Bud came up from South Falls, and the expedition proceeded to the equipment stage.

It was to go in the "Twenty-footer" — the skiff that was the particular pride of Frank Emmett's big brother, Charlie. She was the strongest, fastest, daintiest bit of cedar and walnut-trim on the river. She had rowlocks for four pair of oars. And hence, when you used only two pair, but arranged them alternately, a crew of four could take her through the water like a racing shell. As for steering, you might say she steered herself. In addition to

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which, she possessed a system of lockers, big and little, bow, stern, and amidships, that were, taken together, only a little less commodious than a wardrobe trunk, and, taken singly, rather more fascinating than a chest full of secret drawers.

With the idea of filling those lockers to the best advantage, the four were now nightly resolving themselves into a committee on supplies. The doctor greatly simplified their planning by having the stern lockers measured for a series of tin cases, in which to keep their "commissariat."

"In proportion as you empty them," he explained just a bit facetiously, "you can fill them up with the proceeds of your mound-hunting."

Oatmeal and flour, a little baking-powder, salt, sugar, coffee, and bacon, all these, the old reliables, went without saying, and they would take what bread they could. But they might be away six weeks, and needless to say they could not take enough.

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Whereupon the judge remembered that, when as a boy he had run away to sea from Gloucester, he had been amazed at the filling and sustaining powers of pilot biscuit, and he now insisted upon sending to New York the same day for twenty-five pounds of them.

“Not a word now!” he shut them up. “You’ll find that properly soaked in water, and eaten with a little salt, two of them will make you a good square meal; and before you get back, I promise you you’ll be abundantly thankful that I thought of them.”

A general, and highly disrespectful mispronunciation of their club name — the “Argonauts” — had for the last year given the Four a second appellation — the “Argue-nots,” and they wisely lived up to the appellation when they were talking to the judge. But, in a way, to freight twenty-five pounds of pilot biscuit along with them was to lose sight of the fact that they were

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taking their bass rods; and if the waters of the Upper Wantebec and Lunge Lake didn't do their share towards keeping the pantry full, they had fallen off greatly from what they used to be!

It was also to lose sight of the fact that Jack was taking the "Twenty-two," the one weakness of that otherwise rather serious and grown-up-minded youth. The "Twenty-two" was a worn and dingy little old Flobert, for which her original owner may possibly have paid three dollars. She carried a bullet not much larger or more dangerous than a duck-shot. Her barrel was constantly becoming "plugged," this being no doubt attributable to some marked originality in her rifling. Her sights shifted slightly every time she was jolted, and accordingly required to be readjusted as frequently as a compass seems to require to be boxed.

"But you don't go by her sights, anyway," Jack contended, "and it's just that, too,

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that gives her her value. She teaches a fellow to shoot free arm."

Enough that we have shown that the "Twenty-two" could boast of qualities possessed by no other gun on earth. It had been no more than her just deserts that had made her one of the Club's veritable mascots. And old Job Johnson, the ancient river-man who kept the boat-house, oiled that "Twenty-two," and tightened her sights and bored her out once more.

It was old Job, too, who showed the Four how to roll and strap their sleeping-bags, filled with their "stuff," into genuine *coureur de bois* packs, and how to arrange them across their shoulders so as to get the weight balanced right. "Once do that," he said, "and you could take a two-mile portage carryin' your own weight, and never damp a feather."

When, likewise, Job discovered that they were going north without a supply of "six-inchers," he compelled them forthwith and

UP RIVER

without denial to accept several pounds of his own. One might infer from old Job that you might find yourself in the bush without food, roof, or sense of direction, but if you only had an axe, a fishing line, and six-inch spikes enough, it would be merely a matter of a day or two till you were living in a hotel and having your meals sent up.

Those sleeping-bags were simply good heavy gray blankets, double length, turned end to end, stitched strongly down the sides, and then turned inside out. The doctor had an extra blanket or two, as well as a few rough clothes, put in for Ninny. For themselves, when it came to clothes, the Four were taking a minimum. Old shoes and stockings, sweaters, knickers, and bathing suits — to serve as underwear — if these weren't enough, they would have to be. Mrs. Tuttle and Mrs. Harrison, with whom money was very much a consideration, made Bud and Jack their

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knickers by the simple and inexpensive method of shearing off their first old "longs" at the knees, banding them up, and attaching belt straps; and remarkably good knickers they made.

But there was still the bulk of their stuff to get together. In the matter of a tent, they settled on Booky's new one, though it was a little smaller than the one they'd had the year before. Its poles they left behind. Good enough substitutes could be cut anywhere in fifteen minutes. They took two spades and four trowels for the digging. Bud put in his folding camp-stove. Into the long forward lockers of the Twenty-footer went their cooking gear and tin dishes, a carving knife and a hand-axe, a candle lantern and two boxes of candles, a coil of half-inch rope and Jack's climbing spurs.

They had agreed to take only absolute necessities, but with Tools it went without saying that this included his camera. "Jinks," he said, "supposing we make a

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find — we'll have to have photographs of it!"

In that conscientious and scientific attitude he was strongly supported by Booky. The photographer also took along a box of magnesium flashes — "because they might make their find at night." This on the face of it was improbable, and just why it should have been necessary to include therewith a cone of "red fire," left over from the Fourth, Tools could hardly have explained with clearness himself.

"But," as he said again, "you know these things always come in *somewhere*."

It was no doubt with the same idea that Booky had covertly filled all the locker space around that camera with blue and dark-brown Archæological Reports.

On the other hand, remembering Ninny's fondness for honey, in one of their tin cases the boys had stowed two fat pound combs from the best of Mr. Tuttle's patent hives. They would serve to renew confidence and

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friendship if nothing else would. For let no one think the real purpose of the expedition was forgotten. First, last, and always, it was going to be Ninny first!

By Wednesday morning they were ready. They got away about half-past ten. The Twenty-footer had been loaded in the quiet slip beside old Job's boat-house, and for the last time he helped them, and the little knot of fathers and big brothers looked her over. But everything was shipshape, everything in its place, and every locker crammed. There was a minute or two of final hand-grips, and the Four stepped aboard.

The judge felt that the occasion called for something of judicial sternness. "Remember, now, remember," he said, "you're not going as so many youngsters, but on your honor and responsibility."

The doctor took a much more confident view of things. "Oh, I think they're going to remember, all right," he said. "And — Jack," — he tried to hit him with a neatly

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pitched little Red Astrachan, — “you see to it that that son of mine, Bert, there, does an extra share of the rowing. He’s not sitting on an Archæological Report at the present moment, is he? I can see plainly that you’re going to be the leader. You make that young bookworm work.”

Booky thought of what was in that forward locker, and he became uncommonly red.

“Well, now, I think they’re not going to disappoint us,” said Bud’s father, Mr. Tuttle, a nervous little man — and more nervous at finding himself standing beside the judge.

The current drew the boat further and further out. The four oars swung back, crisply feathering. Old Job raised his Winchester repeater. The departure must be made official.

“Are you ready?”

“Let her go!”

And three times he pumped the trigger.
Whang! Bang! Whang!

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Following the triple report, and almost like a series of reports itself, went up the new Club yell:

“Camp—*cots*!

Tents! *Pots*!

Grub? *Lots*!

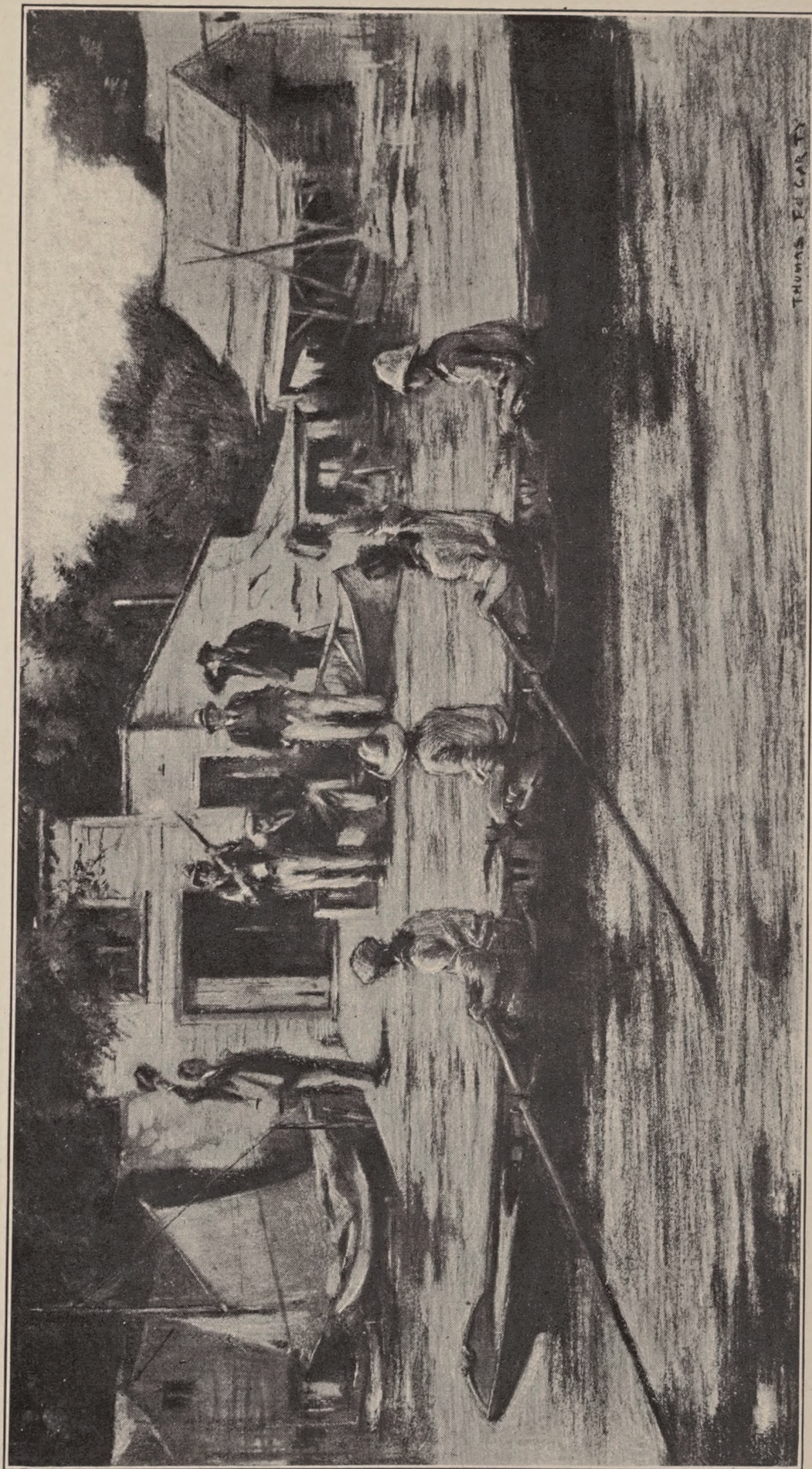
We're the ancient order

Of the Argue-*nots*!

And they were off!

To the town at large, it was simply a fishing trip. No one outside of their own people knew they intended going above Ragged Rapids. But to the Four it was to be a Stanley Relief, and a Mycenæan Exploring expedition all in one!

Yes, and it was to be a great deal more than that. Could any of those four fathers have been given even a partial glimpse of what that next month up the Wantebec was to contain, it was an expedition which would never have left that boat-house wharf at all!



“Camp — cots ! Tents ! Pots ! Grub ? Lots ! We’re the Ancient Order of the Argue-nots !” PAGE 30

CHAPTER THREE

FIRST DAYS—AND A FISH!

A HEAD of them stretched the five winding miles of river and the crooked length of Eleven Mile Lake, which together were to make up the first day's schedule. It was a good long run, but the fresh morning sun was not too hot, and from behind them there came a glorious, snapping breeze, which almost neutralized the current. Not one of the Four but felt a something within him, a kind of joyous, bursting strength, which seemed capable of pulling the Twenty-footer up a mill-race.

At least all of them felt that way for the first hour or two, and then they began to feel that they might just as well take things at a more leisurely gait. They reminded themselves that after all they

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had several weeks ahead in which to try themselves; and in the case of Booky, his palms had begun to pink up noticeably already. When Jack saw that, contrary to the doctor's instructions, he made Booky and Tools drop their oars for awhile. Tools shipped the rudder and steered, and Bud, with Jack stroking, rowed pairs.

But all the while that following breeze from the south was freshening. When they entered Eleven Mile they got the full strength of it, and with it came from Tools' ever fertile mind his first "idea." Why not sail? They hadn't any sail with them, nor any mast; but little things like that shouldn't make any difference. At Tools' ingenious suggestion, they got out the lightest of the blankets, lashed it to a pair of oars just below the blades and above the thole pins, lashed lines above the upper blanket ties again, making the same fast by a running noose about the thwarts furthest aft. That gave them two masts,

FIRST DAYS

with a sail stretched between, and to “step” those masts, all they had to do was to drive their butts firmly down among the remaining rolls of bedding. In ten minutes that blanket was straining and bellying as if it had been intended for such lateen service from the beginning. They were ascending Eleven Mile hand over fist, without even the necessity of fanning themselves. Bud climbed up forward to act as lookout man. Jack and Tools looked after the lines, and Booky in the steersman’s seat contemplated a double row of what must soon have been fine large blisters.

“Good egg!” he said blissfully, and turned to survey the wake they were leaving.

“Two or three good eggs!” said Tools.

“A whole nest of them!” said Jack.

“What’s more,” added the bookworm, “it’d be a sin and a shame to let such a boss sail as that pull only us. So I’m going to make it pull a trolling line as well.”

It was evident that he must have had

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such intention in view when he had loaded his particular locker in the stern sheets, for he had left one of their new sixty-yard lengths of good fine-wove cotton twist almost at the top of it. There was precious little likelihood, of course, of their catching anything with the troll in Eleven Mile; its reputation was gone for everything but bass and mud cat, but, as Booky had reminded them, they weren't pulling the boat, and it was always worth while spinning a spoon merely on a chance. The glittering little "wash-board" was soon baptized, and kicking merrily in the swirls and eddies a hundred and fifty feet behind.

At Fish Island they lowered sail and put in for lunch, but they made it a cold lunch and a rapid one. For that following breeze was altogether too valuable for any short-sighted sacrificing. But, when they shoved out again, it was stronger, if anything, than ever. They could see the end of the lake, now. They could begin to

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believe that Half-Mile Carry would be only an incident. They would do that famous portage between breezes — it would merely give them an opportunity to get the kinks out of their legs, and then they'd go right on to Loon Chute before supper.

“Booky,” said Tools, “dig a book out of the library and read us something. I'll hold the troll for awhile.”

“Sure. Nothing I'd like bett —”

“*Gosh!*”

It was Bud, the lookout, who had said that. And now, “*Look, fellows, look!*” he followed, in the same almost agonized whisper.

They could just see that he was trying to indicate something to starboard, and then, as the sail ceased to mask it from them, they saw for themselves. A good three inches from the surface there slantingly projected the head of a muskellunge that would be big for anything they might hope to catch in Lunge Lake itself! And

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the monster did not seem in the least afraid of them. According to the stories told by old fishermen, when a 'lunge "gets lost," he takes this method of finding himself, which is a geographical improbability on the face of it. In any case this father of 'lunges was showing neither hurry nor anxiety, and the Twenty-footer passed so close to him that they could almost have belted him with an oar.

"Oh, *say!*"

"Oh, heave something at him!"

Jack tried desperately to get to his "rifle." The sail went down on top of Bud, but he only climbed from under to get another look from the bow.

"Oh, aunty, what'll we do?"

"We can't do a thing!"

Even while they were speaking the long, green, wolf-like head dropped coolly out of sight again. One chance alone remained. Booky was going hard to starboard with his rudder line. He could at least bring

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his still-spinning spoon somewhere over that ring of ripples, and four pairs of eyes watched it achingly. As noiselessly as he could, Jack got his oars in again. With the sail down, something must be done to keep the line up. As it was, for a moment that glinting nickel dropped out of sight. Another five seconds — another two would decide it!

“No use! Too bad! But we — ”

“*Whee!*” Booky was lifted half out of his seat by the jerk. The line zipped sawing along the gunwale. “Jinks, get the rudder out; fellows, get the rudder out! We’ve got him!”

Tools plunged for the rudder, almost taking a header. But he got it out, and back upon the sail, where it would be clear of trouble. And Jack, whipping his oars in, prepared to use one of them as a paddle — if necessary, as a gaffing club.

“Give him line!” he yelled.

“Give him all he needs!” yelled Bud.

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“As long as he doesn’t get any slack!” came from Tools. “Fasten your reel to a thwart or something!”

And with that, twenty-five yards behind them, there was a surging *whoosh!* Four feet — almost five — of mottled, watery olive-green shot bow-like into the air; for one dazzling moment showed white as it turned half over, and then struck the water flat on with the crack of an ox whip!

“Oh, mommer! Oh, deliriousness! Oh —” This time Booky got a jerk that nearly fetched him overboard. Indeed, being the smallest, and the only unathletic member of the Four, it was an even toss-up if he could hold that ’lunge of ’lunes, when the long fight came. But, while he made no motion to give up the line, there was not one of the other three who could have been paid to suggest asking him to give it up.

“Stay with it, old man, stay with it!” encouraged Bud. “You’re sure in for the time of your life!”

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Booky gasped and gasped again, as if the water had closed over him along with the fish. He got another jerk, and another. It was like holding the handles of a battery!

“Play him! Play him!” Jack swept the Twenty-footer around with a swashing roll. She answered to the paddle like a birch-bark, or they would have had no chance at all.

But now the great “fighter fish” was making furiously off in the direction of Sunken Meadows.

“Jinks, we can’t let him get into them!”

“Them” referred to the tangle of old water-logged trees and brush that made up the under-surface portion of the Meadows. “Once let him get a turn of the line around a root ——!”

“I’ll try to take some in on him,” said Booky, painfully. “Maybe that’ll turn him.”

But, considering that Booky’s all too soft and pinky palms had already begun to blister

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from the oars, what punishment were they not receiving now! He said nothing. For minute after minute he tried to pull a little line in. And now he gained a foot, now lost it in that choking tug-of-war. But the strength of the monster — its very fury — was plainly beginning to go to his nerves, like some kind of watery buck fever. Every moment, too, was now bringing them nearer the Meadows. And then, to his honor, when he saw the possibility of his losing them that fish, he gave up at once.

“You take it, Jack,” he said; “I guess I’m not his size!”

“Sure you are, old boy, sure!” But in the same moment Jack caught the twist from him. And Bud relieved him at the paddle.

It was time that line was in new and stronger and unwearied hands. Even so, only all Bud’s strength backing water kept them away from a first big outpost snag.

Bud backed till it looked as if he were

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going to split the paddle blade. And shoving his jaw out, Jack held the line where it was. Good as they knew that cotton twist to be — more reliable than any silk for a long battle — he did not venture to make his fight under that double tension. But this, at any rate, the quarry seemed to realize: the Sunken Meadow game was up. And he showed his feelings in the only way he knew.

Whoosh! This time he snapped his jaws together in the air as he made his jump!

“Jinks!”

“He’ll go twenty-five if he’ll go a pound,” whispered Bud, fairly overawed. “Say, I guess we’ll all of us get our turn at him, before we’re through with it.”

“I think likely you will,” said Jack. Already the perspiration hung from his temples and nose and chin in drops. And he was yet to try to do more than hold the line where it had been.

“He wants to tow us,” he said; “and it

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suits me all right. I feel as if I needed a few minutes to get on to his curves!”

The great fish was towing them! And — though it must be said that the wind was with him, too — for a hundred yards he kept it up indomitably.

“Say,” said Jack, “I like you. If I was a ’lunge you’re just the kind I’d like to be! You’re the goods, no mortal doubt of it! But you needn’t take the hands right off me. Wow!”

Then, with another jump, once more all regular conversation ended!

Up till then they had been in “green water.” Now, here and there ahead of them, it was a mottled green, the color of the great *lucius* himself.

“We’re getting into bass-weed,” said Bud. “How’ll that shape up for him?”

“A heap sight — better — than it will for us!” Every pause had meant a jerk. The hot sweat ran down Jack’s face and neck and soaked into the collar of his shirt.

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For a moment he had to give line. But it was only because his fingers, feeling as if they were cut half through already, wouldn't admit of his doing anything else.

Yet, whatever advantage their fish might have taken from the bass-weed, he had turned and was breaking for the breadth of the lake again. And every minute he was fighting like a rabid bulldog. By this time Jack had sweat in both his eyes.

"How you toughin' it, Jocky? Supposing I take it now?" Bud decided to speak at last.

And he had spoken at the proper moment. Jack smiled sorely. "Oh, I'm not proud, at all. All I want — is to make sure we don't lose him!" The line was shoved along to the rashly waiting third victim!

Bud's story was soon told. His desire to hold the battery lasted till they had rounded one of the rocky little islands in mid-channel. And the look of astonishment his face assumed from the first gave place only to one of growing torture.

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“Oh, lordy!” he said. “Oh, skids! But — I’m — not giving — him — anything!” And he braced himself anew and tried unhappily to set his teeth. “Great Eli! Say, how long does this sort of thing generally last?”

“I’ve heard of it lasting two hours,” said Jack. “Sometimes three or four.”

Again the fish went about — the line ripped the water into a little fin — and he started for Old Channel.

Booky was now in the bow, and he began to watch the water anxiously again. Where, a few minutes before, it had been mottled, it was beginning to yellow in streaks and patches.

“It’s shoaling, fellows,” he warned them; “It’s shoaling. I mind we hit the sand bars somewhere around here, last summer!”

The others didn’t hear him. Bud was too palpably nearing his finish. Another two minutes of that diabolical jig-saw and pulley-hauling was going to be enough for him!

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But "Me next!" said Tools, with the courage of him who has not as yet had his experience. "And I've got a little idea, too." In his turn he had found his way to the stern.

"*Sure!* What'd Toolsy be without his ideas!"

"I'm going to kneel. It'll let me be high enough to — to sort of see things."

"Anything — to — oblige!" said the afflicted Bud. The line ran down the gunwale of itself, and Tools caught it as it burned across his wrist. "Say, it's getting *shallo* —"

He had caught the line, he had risen upon his knees, but only then did he get full knowledge of what that fish could do! It was out of the question for him to let go, of course, and he went straight over the stern as if hoisted from behind! Jack drove in his steering oar. Bud clutched for another.

"Hold her there, fellows, hold her there!"

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But there was really no great cause for alarm. The water, as they forthwith had the best of proof, was not three feet deep. Tools came up, spurted out about a quart of it, and, gurgle upon gulp, swallowed almost as much more. And this, too, could be said to the credit of that man of "ideas": not for an instant had he let go the line. A succession of wallowing, galvanic jerks, as he tried to find his feet, showed that.

"And this is where we make the finish!" shouted Jack, the light of decisive battle in his eyes. "Buddy, stand by to let him have it when Toolsy and I get him in!"

Next moment he had gone overboard as well. He had braced Tools with one hand, and caught at the line with the other.

No fish has its full fighting strength unless it can strike from time to time for deep water. And Jack and Tools, working together, began to move gradually towards a place where the sand showed honey-tinted

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within a few inches of the surface. There was a little bass-weed here and there — but nothing that that 'lunge could take hold of. He could not even give full vent to his rage by jumping now. The best he could do was to flop about from time to time on the surface like a gravelled salmon. The shoaler it got, the less he was able to hold back. And now, unable to restrain himself any longer, Bud jumped over, too, with an oar in his hand.

Splashing through the water, he ran down the twitching line till he was squarely behind the fish.

“Will I hit him? Will I hit him?”

“Not if you can get him without!”

And Bud did get him without. He put both hands through his gills, and — soused to the hair by the slapping, threshing tail — fairly shoved their trophy ahead of him till he was high and dry. Then and then only could he be given that crack on the back of his head with the edge of the oar blade which

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kills a big fish without spoiling him for mounting.

They got him into the boat, and hoisted the sail again, and started once more for the head of the lake. Booky looked at his watch. He had looked at it before when they were leaving Fish Island, and they knew, or could calculate, just about how long it had been between then and the moment when they got the strike. A little sum in subtraction told them that that battle royal had lasted for more than an hour and ten minutes!

But was it worth it! Oh, was it worth it! The first day out and already they had a trophy that deserved the mantel-place in the Club!

"I'll skin him to-night," said Jack. "What we can't eat for supper we can likely dry. And the skin and head, with a little drying and smoking, will keep like rawhide! Tools, you for your first mounting job, when we get back!"

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The shore line was gradually becoming rougher and wilder. Great masses of granite rose among the young cedars. And ragged, bleaching stump ends overhung the water. At about half-past four they rounded the last point, and there, standing up ahead, bone-white and unmistakable, were the three girdled trees which marked the beginning of Half Mile Carry.

Two minutes more and the nose of the Twenty-footer was grounding at the portage.

It was their first opportunity to test the value of old Job's instructions in the art of "pack toting." And while the task of getting those blanket packs to bale up properly offered certain initial difficulties, in five minutes the whole four of them were hitting the trail, feeling as if they were good for ten miles of it at that gait!

They followed the old logging road, constructed when the Wantebec was a pine country, and now all overgrown with mosses. Even the ancient corduroy over the stretches

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of "ma'sh" could hardly be distinguished now, for the masses of maidenhair and lilies of the valley and blue-eyed grass which covered it.

They came out in the little clearing above the Upper Rapids, startling a kingfisher into clucking fits. But they stopped only long enough to roll out the contents of those blanket packs and emit a long hilarious whoop; then they dived back down the green shadows of the portage again.

A second trip, and all the light gear was safely over. It was the turn of the Twenty-footer herself. And to freight her proved to be an even easier job. It was only a matter of turning her gunwale down over a pair of old ash loading stakes, and taking her two and two. They did that third half-mile at a dog-trot, and shouting their Club war-cry!

"We've got to keep in mind, though," said Bud, "that we didn't do a whole lot of rowing to-day."

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“Oh, I don’t know,” said Tools, “I think we had some exercise that was a mighty sight huskier!”

And, as it was, once the Twenty-footer was resting easily in her proper element again, they were quite ready to flop down among the withered May apples beside the remainder of their goods and chattels again. The sun was dropping low. Loon Chute was still a long distance to the northward. They decided they’d make it a case of camp, after all, and there would be a good deal to do before they could set up for the night, at that.

Jack got together the sheet-iron sections and the steel skewers of the camp stove. “If you and Tools,” he said to Booky, “will get things ready for supper, Bud and I will take the axe and see about some tent-poles.”

There was driftwood enough for their fire on the patch of grass they had to clear for the blankets. And there was enough

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more along shore to have lasted them a year. But, as good foresters, they didn't spread their fire around.

Jack fixed up the 'lunge. It was out of the question, even with the appetites they had by now, to eat it all. And the smoking process, as far as the meat was concerned, was not any epoch-marking success. But it was what they needed for their trophy. They spread the skin and head about a little log, and left them where they could continue drying by the fire all night.

Supper over — and it was a huge one — they opened the tent flap full width, and slipped out of their shoes and outer clothing, and pulled those sleeping-bags into the clear, so that they could watch the soft red glow of the dying back logs. Bud and Tools produced their mouth-organs, and they played *Tenting To-night*, and *My Old Kentucky Home*, and *Suwanee River*, and a dozen other sweetly solemn things. The friendly guardianship of their bivouac kept

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the thousand night sounds of woods and water from being too weird and lonesome. And through the woods the rapids below them murmured ever more and more sleepily. In time even the wondering stars, looking serenely down upon them, could no longer keep them out of dreamland. And so ended their first day on the river.

CHAPTER FOUR

LUNGE LAKE AND THE TIME OF WAITING

SPACE lacks to tell the whole story of that week's journey up the Wantebec. Mile after mile of free river made in record time! Portages taken on the trot! Bass that tested their rods even as that 'lunge had tested their trolling tackle! Night after night spent in the flush and glow of their camp-fire light! And when Bud and Tools didn't provide an evening's entertainment with their mouth-organs, Booky, whose mind was beginning to go to the mounds again, got out one of those Archæological Reports and read aloud about how the great fortress and ceremonial mounds of Ohio and Wisconsin had come to be discovered—in short, the days and nights both seemed made up of pure delight. And at length the Twenty-footer

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passed the muddy West Branch, and found herself in the waters of the Upper Wantebec.

They were pulling past the Old Shanties, their seventy-mile mark, when they made out some one above them coming down the river in a canoe. It was Uncle Billy McLeash, as they guessed at once. We have said that Uncle Billy carried a fortnightly mail up and down between Wantebec and the North Woods.

And, as soon as Uncle Billy caught sight of the boys, he stopped with a jerk and swung anxiously in to give them a piece of news which his mail-bag did not contain.

“They’re clean gone on the rampage!” he said, rubbing the few upstanding gray hairs on the top of his cranium. “An’ the whole three camps in the big chain! Lordy, you boys got no call to be going anywhere near them!”

“Near who?” they asked.

“Them spruce choppers! An’ as I’ve heerd tell, you’d ought to ’a’ got to know

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them from your expairience up there last year!”

“Why,” said Jack, “they didn’t hurt us such a much.” But Uncle Billy’s worri-ment was a little catching. “What’s got them now?”

“Them free-traders has got them!” “Free-traders,” it may be explained, are gentry who make it their business to introduce illicit liquor into the spruce and lumber bush. “I don’t know how they done it, but you’d say that they’d managed, somehow, to run in a whole freighter load o’ forty-rod — an’ stuff strong enough, beside’, to kill at smellin’ distance. An’ the gangs has been crazy ever sence! That Lunge Lake bunch druv’ both their bosses out o’ camp two days ago. An’ they’ve been makin’ Satan’s own time of it in twenty other ways!”

“What — what’s going to be done about it?” asked Booky.

“No good to ask me!” said the old man,

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staring, as he remembered some new phase of the disaster. "I've promised boss Hallerwell to say nothin' about it down to Wantebec. For the boss has hoofed it overland to Macadac Mills to try to get some new men before it'll get knowed about. I've promised not to tell down to Wantebec," he recollected; "but that ain't any good reason why I shouldn't give you boys, comin' up river, your warnin' to keep away from Loggers' Inlet!"

"Thanks, Uncle Billy. It's mighty good of you to warn us. And you can be dead sure we'll give the Inlet all the room it needs."

"Irish Mike's at the head of it," he continued; "as good-natur'd a hard lot as ever I know, too. But, my word, when they get a-goin'! I only hope Ninny don't take no notion to go down there just now! My conscience, for a week o' mischief! You boys don't go nowheres near them!"

They assured him again that they

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wouldn't. And still repeating his warnings, Uncle Billy pushed out and down river once more. They assured themselves, too, several times over, that that outbreak in the spruce shanties needn't make any difference as far as they were concerned. Had there been no such outbreak, of course, they would have run into the shanties, as they passed, to ask for news of Ninny. But it wasn't likely he'd be anywhere in the neighborhood of the shanties at the present time. He had found their camp once before without their seeking him. There was the same reason to believe he would again. And that "rampage" wasn't going to make any difference to them whatever.

By that time portaging had become only a kind of game. In the nightly operation of laying out camp, the first two men to reach the site agreed upon would pace off and drop the markers for the tent-pegs before the tent itself arrived. And when it did arrive, so well had they learned their

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team work, they could spread the canvas, chop and notch the poles, and have the whole lifted and covering their sleeping-bags with almost the swift, machine-like precision of firemen handling a life net. One night, when it rained a little, that came in very handily too.

And every day seemed to give them better fishing. The bass were of such a size that when they had kept three or four of them — and the others they dropped back at once — they had enough to fill their pan twice over. In one deep cove above Ragged Rapids, where they hove to in the shade of an overhanging pine to eat their lunch, when they dropped their crumbs and meat scraps over the side, there was a flicker and a rush of foot-long green shadows beneath them which made them almost believe that they could take to fishing with their hands!

They had told themselves that the “ram-paging” of those spruce cutters wasn’t going to make any difference to them what-

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ever. But they saw fit to take it decidedly into consideration when at last their next day's pull must take them into Lunge Lake.

Along its west side, from a point four miles below the Narrows, to where it emptied into the river at the lake's extreme northern end, stretched the territory of the Chippewa Reservation. On the east side, and almost at the point where the lake became the river, lay that Loggers' Inlet spruce camp. And the Four made up their minds that it would behoove them to pass the Narrows at an hour when there would be the least possible likelihood of their attracting the attention of either the "Reservationers" on the one side, or the spruce men on the other. Nor ought this to call for any great degree of planning. It would simply be a matter of lying along shore five or six miles below the lake end, and then taking the Twenty-footer through on the "D. Q." some time before dawn. There was moon enough; and they

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felt that they could do it without any moon at all.

Once in the lake itself, they could be of easy minds. To say nothing of its hundred intermingled islands, Lunge Lake possessed as many little crooked points and twistings and involutions as the roots of an old pine stump. Without eluding the acuteness of Ninny's animal-like instincts, by camping in the right place, they ought to be able to keep out of the sight of all "rampaging" spruce men for weeks. Furthermore, they would choose a point as far as possible from the Reservation.

By dawn, two days later, they were out of the river and in the lake at last. On the left hand they had skirted the half-stranded length of the "boom" — a 600-foot chain of long top-flattened logs, later to be used in imprisoning the untethered rafts. On their right, just within the bushy point of the inlet, were the shanties; at that gray, half-daylight hour

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they lay as still and lifeless as if they had been deserted for a hundred years. And an hour after sunrise the boys established themselves at the head of a deep, fiord-like bay about a mile to the north.

Though the shore was open enough in other directions, between them and the shanties there was a dense growth of cedars. And unless the spruce gang took to making rowing excursions in their *chaloupes* — which was unlikely enough — the Four were almost as secure as if they had followed the natural yearnings of their hearts and buried their ten feet of white canvas and the yellow length of the Twenty-footer in the depths of the major's archipelago. It was for Ninny's sake that they remained on the mainland, and at least not too far away from the shanties. They were going to give him all the chance they could. But, from their experience of the year before, they had little doubt that he would find them anywhere.

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And during the first day they did little more than get things set up, and sit about their camp and wait.

They saw nothing of him. But to balance that they saw nothing of the "rampagers." Again and again, however, through the day, and till all hours of the night, there came up to them the sound of uproarious shouts and yells and singing. They could even recognize *The Old Black Bull*, and the French-Canadian "*En Roulant ma Boule*."

Yet that yelling and singing came no closer to them. And by the afternoon of the second day they felt that they could begin to let themselves turn to that second object of their expedition. They commenced to do a little mound-hunting. They could not go far. But they submitted all the surrounding shore to the most exhaustive of "archæological surveys." Within a few hours, too, they were finding mounds by the dozen. But they all alike, when probed into, proved to possess a core

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either of decayed pine stump or of solid rock.

It was not long until Jack had had enough of it for that day. Following his instincts as guardian and provider for the party, he made an examination of their oatmeal tin, and their two sides of bacon, one of which had been half used already — and went forth with a box of cartridges and the rifle. Of course there were fish in plenty. But fish are food of which you cannot long continue to make three meals a day.

“And there’s no danger of them hearing her,” he said, “once I get another mile or so to the north. Her sights are a little off again. But, jinks, a fellow that gets into the way of depending on sights! I tell you, I feel more and more that she’s going to be an everlasting lot of use to us up here. We may be depending on her altogether before we get back. And a bigger gun would simply have been in the way.”

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They had heard something like that before.

Jack did get a gray squirrel, though. And an uncommonly good stew that gray squirrel made. But in the afternoon, and the morning, and the afternoon again that followed, he got nothing else of any sort. Plainly the peerless weapon was not living up to its reputation. None the less, when, next day, Jack hung it up and joined them in that search for mounds, there was general wonderment.

But for that matter, the mound-hunting had been even less successful. And as for Ninny, while, the year before, he had found them almost in a morning, four days had now passed, and they had still seen nothing of him.

But what they were treated to, late that afternoon, was a visit from a big canoe-party of young Chippewas from the Reservation.

The Reservation, precisely like every

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town of white people, had its good elements and its bad. The old people were quiet, and law-abiding enough. And they attempted, too, to give the law to the second generation. But among the young men there were a considerable number who had no intention of taking law from any one. They boasted that they had never worked. They followed the fall fairs, and haunted the spring race-meets. In summer they moved out of the Reservation and tented by themselves up toward the north of the lake. And upon any fishing party rash enough to mount the river to the islands, they descended with an instinct half rap-torial, half vulture-like. By way of giving themselves countenance, they filled the bows of their birch-barks with samples of sweet-grass knickknacks, snow-shoes, bark baskets, bows and arrows, and toy canoes.

Not that those grimy-handed, shifty-eyed young gentlemen ever wasted their energies on producing such things themselves. As

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they gallantly explained it now to the four "Argue-nots," "You say want 'em, old man Chippeway and old mother squaw make 'em heap quick for Satu'day."

When they received no orders, they demanded tobacco.

Jack told them flatly that they didn't use it.

"Tha's a lie!" they answered pleasantly. And then, in the pure brazenness of their numbers, they began to investigate for themselves. They pushed by Bud and entered the tent. They lifted the sleeping-bags, dug into the camera box, and opened the magnesium "flashes." One of them managed to break Tools' bass reel. And far from making any apologies, he passed that ruined reel up and down among his fellows, and sniggered over it as if it was one of the funniest things in his experience.

In the end, too, the boys were fairly compelled to buy them off. They promised that they might look at some bows — the big, fifty-cent, man-sized ones — if the

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party should be coming back at some time in the future.

When the Four did finally see the last of them, they were ready to burst. And a few minutes later it was discovered that a box of gimp hooks and two trolling lines were missing.

“Let’s go out on the water and try to get cool,” said Jack; “anyway, after that, they’re not likely to come back again at all.”

They had before then begun to make little fishing excursions out into the lake, though they had never gone far enough to be observed from the inlet.

“But I don’t see,” said Tools, next morning, “why we shouldn’t cross over as far as the islands. If we kept well to the north, there wouldn’t be one chance in fifty of their spotting us.”

“Like as not Ninny’s somewhere in there himself.”

“And you see, that was where I found that first mound,” said Booky.

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The risk seemed a justifiable one. And that day they began to re-explore the major's archipelago.

Covering perhaps two miles square in the center of the lake, that Chautauqua-to-be formed one unbroken, interlocking labyrinth — and as the “labyrinth” they were soon to speak of it. Frequently what had appeared to be three islands turned out to be half a dozen. It was all one Chinese puzzle of crooks, and turn-backs, and involutions. Almost never did the Twenty-footer emerge from the same door at which she had gone in. Somewhere in the middle of the archipelago, and possibly left by the lumbermen as a landmark, towered a huge old pine. But it was a day and a half before the “Argue-nots” set foot upon the island on which that grand-daddy of pines was growing.

Even then they found it only by chance. For the twentieth time Jack and Booky had lost themselves in a series of cedar-

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shaded "blind channels" which they had already come to call the "labyrinth," when suddenly the mighty, dark-green head of that pillaring conifer seemed to rise almost above their heads. In front of them were two steep little headlands of bush-crowned granite, with only an eight-foot lane of water between them. They punted through, turned a rocky shoulder, and saw that it was another case of two islands really being one. They were in a natural harbor, with a sloping beach. Under the great pine there was an ideal camping site. But above it the rock, overgrown with hazel and raspberry bushes and little evergreens, rose up in log-strewn ledges and *crevasses*, "balds," and peaks, some of which they could hardly climb.

"It's a regular Port Arthur!" said Jack. And when, on leaving, they worked the Twenty-footer around the outside circuit, save that the real Port Arthur is on an isthmus, the name seemed to be doubly a

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good one. Those granite shores rose so sheerly — sometimes to twenty-five feet, and scarcely anywhere to less than eight or ten — and they had been polished so smooth by centuries of spring floods, that only at one place at the back did it seem possible to scale them.

And there were other islands in the “labyrinth” hardly less interesting. Needless to say, several times they revisited the little “tumulus” on the island where Booky had made his find the year before. But now the ash-streaked soil of that “tumulus” yielded them only another small fragment of pottery and a blue flint arrow-head.

And, once more, all this had not brought them to Ninny, nor Ninny to them. When were they to come in touch with him?

After supper, one fine clear evening, they put their bass rods into the Twenty-footer and pulled down to the “big weed bed.” The “big weed bed” was a good deal nearer

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Loggers' Inlet than their camp itself. It was about as near, in fact, as they had ever ventured to go. Yet it was quite as completely hidden from the shanties. It always gave them a good hour's sport. It was the nearest of the good fishing places, and they had several times gone out there to catch their next morning's breakfast.

They were still fishing when the sun set. They had landed three big "small-mouths" — the gamiest of bass — and two pickerel. A heron staring suspiciously at them squawked a hostile "Get-off-the earth!" And then, from the inlet, a sudden, roaring shout of delight blew up to them. Another followed it, and another.

"They're in good humor, anyway," said Bud. "If we were going to ask them about Ninny, now'd be the right time, I guess."

But that was something to think about; and the others merely listened and made no answer.

Yet that first outburst was every moment

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growing louder and louder; it was rising to whoops and halloos.

“They’re certainly feeling good over something. Maybe now would be a good time to get information.”

“They might be able to tell us exactly where we could put our hands on him.”

But the next minute was to tell them that. High over all that shouting hilarity there rose a loud, pitiful bellowing. It might have come from some big, harmless animal under torment. But it did not come from an animal. Not one of the Four but knew on the moment that it came from Ninny himself! And now it made itself heard again.

They jerked in their rods, clutched the oars, and then — and then for a moment they halted again. What were they going to try to do? There were only the four of them. And in that spruce gang there were more than thirty men.

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Even as they sat there, hesitating, that first terrified bellowing went up into a tortured, barking shriek. The shouts and roars of delight grew only the wilder. But they were broken now by sounds of struggling, of men falling and others rushing to their assistance. And then, upon a sudden, amid a general yell of triumph, that tortured barking was shut off for second after second by some throttling, choking gag.

“That’s enough!” said Jack. “That’s enough! We can’t sit here and listen to that!”

And their oars were in the water again almost with a single movement.

They were all of them very pale. For who could say what they were pulling into? But whenever that wretched bellowing dropped down to that horrible, strangled gurgle, it made them feel weak and sick. They had never taken the Twenty-footer at such a pace before; but it seemed as if they were towing a raft of logs.

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Yet they brought her swirling around the cedar-covered point of the Inlet at last. And then the whole scene revealed itself within a stone's throw of them.

CHAPTER FIVE

A RESCUE

IT was Ninny!

His hair and beard had been close cropped, which kept them from being sure at first. In fact, one of the gang was still holding a pair of huge camp shears above his head. But those old lynx skins and cast off lumber-jack clothes could cover no one else. And now he was writhing at full length on the bank, with half a dozen big-booted choppers on top of him; while "Jombateest" — the boys knew that fat French Canadian in a minute from old acquaintance — was thrusting the neck of a bottle between his teeth.

"This is the old original water cure for batty guys!" shouted another spruce man maudlinly. "On'y we give it with the stuff that's worth the drinkin'!"

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And at that moment some of the gang caught sight of the Twenty-footer.

“Well in the name o’ Pat!” The first to find his voice was the dark-faced “Cash-down” Corkery; and “Cash-down” also there was no mistaking. “An’ where did youse come from?”

“We come from up above! And, ah, what are you doing to Ninny there?” All the boys seemed to shout it together. “Ah, let him alone, can’t you! Let him alone!”

“*La-ga-di-ga-da-ga-dieu!*”

“Say—fer *cheek!* Bump ta-ra-rum!”

“*Nom d’une pipe! Ai! ‘En roulant ma boule, en roulant!—’*” Some of the Frenchmen began discordantly to sing again.

“An’ we’ve seen them before, too, somewheres!” said “Cash-down” above the bedlam. “Hi! Watch him lads! He’ll be away from youse!”

They flung themselves back upon Ninny, got his head down once more, and once more that greasy “Canajun” cook — for, as

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always, he was torturer-in-chief — thrust a gagging bottle into the open mouth.

“Let up, now! Let up!” cried the boys, in an agony. “You’ll hear about this down in Wantebec!”

“Ah, we’re seein’ to it that he don’t get enough to hurt him!” bawled “Cash-down” again. “Give him some more, Bateeste!”

“Yah, I ‘tal yo’,” hiccuped a lanky Swede known as Long Yon, “I tal yo’ it ban goot for his healt!”

“Shu-rure it is!”

“*Parfaitement! ‘En roulant ma boule, —*” And for a time the yelling chorus again drowned everything.

“Will youse shut yer faces fer a minute! These here kids has come up here to resky Ninny!”

And, as “Cash-down” spoke, again that stifled voice became a strangle.

“Well, we’ll just do what we can, anyway!” shouted Jack. And no longer caring

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what happened to them, the boys started their boat for shore.

At that moment Irish Mike, big and beaming, mop-haired, and irresponsible as ever, came out of the woods to the right of the shanties. "Hay, what ye at with Ninny now? Wasn't robbin' the poor lad of his hair an' whisk — Gobs! an' where did the bhoys an' skiff drop from?"

"We've come from down river — to get Ninny, and —"

"Ah, look out, there! Look out! — Cripes! — The wolverine!"

Ninny had got half-way to his feet. At the first sound of these familiar voices — the voices of friends! — for one dumb incredulous moment he had lain staring. Then, with a tremendous, bursting heave, he had managed to throw himself over and get upon his hands.

"Ah, for the — Grip his legs again! — Youse would, would you! Take him lower! Throw him, Jack! All of youse pile on!"

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“Cash-down” himself now went heavily to the gravel. “Kill the beggar! Lay him out with a rock!”

But it was too late. The whole clump rolled down the bank like a pack of hunting dogs trying to fasten upon a bear — but their hold was broken. Ninny rose with one of them still clinging upon his shoulders. But an instant later he had bucked him over his head, and breaking his way headlong through all opposition, he took to the water.

“It’s all right, Ninny! It’s all right!” yelled the boys, almost beside themselves, and amid a volley of stones from the shore they rushed the Twenty-footer in to meet him.

He was now drawing his breath in long, panting gasps; and when by the sheer muscle-power given by necessity they had dragged him over the stern, he could do little more than lie where he had fallen.

Now that the moment had come, it had

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come with most breath-taking suddenness. They had no time to think. They only saw that he was as he had been the year before, big and ragged, immense of sinew, yet childlike in his weak-wittedness. But he was in their keeping now, and if need should be, they were going to protect him with their lives!

“Ninny’s a good feller!” he breathed, choking. “Ninny’s a good feller!”

“Sure!” they answered, quiveringly.

“You’re all right, Ninny! And we’re going to take care of you, what’s more!”

But for the first minutes they had to think of the immediate present. As they swept around and down the inlet, they could see, farther up the shore, those two spruce camp *chaloupes* — big cumbrous craft, but fast enough when they had a full crew to pull their oars. And some of the gang had stopped throwing stones and were running for them now. They were going to give chase by water, so much was plain.

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In the minds of those four breathless "Argue-nots" there was a single thought. They could not — even had they had all their belongings packed and ready for an immediate run south and home — they could not risk trying to pass the shanties again at once, or as long as the gang were watching for them; but by making use of every second of the now fast-falling dusk they could get up to camp, pitch their gear into the boat in any way at all, whip back into the lake, and hide among the islands till the cover of the night should let them slip past into the river in safety. If necessary, indeed, they could wait till that same before-dawn hour at which they had passed the shanties coming up.

All their plans for mound-hunting had come to an end before they had had a chance to use a spade. But it was not a moment when they could feel regrets. It was enough, as they made their camp and hastily loaded

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the Twenty-footer, to see that Ninny stayed with them as if he never intended to leave them more.

Everything in the boat, and with room only for Jack and Tools at the oars, they pulled out of their bay again. It was barely in time to escape the first of those madly pursuing spruce camp craft.

It was fortunate for the Four that they knew the islands as well as they did by now. With the *chaloupes* following them in one yapping hue-and-cry, they pushed into the black gulf of the nearest channel. Then, punting back and forth through all its crooks and deviations, they half groped their way toward that island that was like Port Arthur.

Every few moments they could catch a roar of rage louder and more ferocious than any before it, as Irish Mike and his fellows tried in vain first to feel their way after them through the Egyptian darkness of the "labyrinth," and then, failing that,

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to pull themselves out again. At the end of it, too, the gang did seem somehow to have got back into open water, and for the time, the astounded echoes heard no more of them.

The Twenty-footer found those two little headlands which had led them into "Port Arthur" the first time. She passed through into the harbor, struck two or three half sunken logs among the rushes, and made the beach.

The rocks piled themselves high above them; but in the little cove under the great pine the ground was low enough for safe concealment. For a time they said and did nothing whatever. Then — "I think," whispered Jack, "that we could risk building a fire and getting something to eat. I know we're not feeling a whole lot like it. But we'll have to eat sometime to-night!"

"And Ninny," said Tools; "likely enough he's half starving. He wouldn't

A RESCUE

have gone down to the shanties again if he hadn't been."

They went a little way up from the beach to where the cedars were thickest, cut out two or three little ones, and started a fire in the middle of the remaining clump.

In the bottom of the boat they still had those bass and pickerel which they had caught in the big weed bed, and a little digging among their jumbled supplies turned up the coffee and the last of the bread. They began, too, to discover how hungry they really were, once they commenced to get the smell of the food. And Ninny! If in the beginning he had continued to sit in a huddle on the other side of the fire, drawn and faint from what he had gone through, his first big mug of hot coffee seemed to bring back to him strength and motion and an absolutely ravening appetite together! It went to their hearts to see him watching the frying pan with glittering eyes that pretended not to, while his mouth

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framed a gratitude that was beyond any power of man to express.

No less did it go to the heart to see him, with an impulse that no one could have looked for, making shy, grotesque attempts to get back to the use of a knife and fork. They filled his plate again and again; then finished by bringing him out one of those fat little honeycombs, the extra sleeping-bag, and the clothes.

At the sight of them — and when he understood that all that, too, was meant for him — with a queer wild sound, he sank down and began weakly and shakenly to cry.

They could hardly bring themselves to look at him. With his great, trembling, kindly face, brown and hairy to the eyes, at certain moments he made them think of some big dog, and at the next minute of a child of three again; and again, there were times when he almost looked the man he should have been — but a man who has

A RESCUE

lost something. Nor did they feel so much that his wits were gone as that his sufferings had bereft him of all rightful human courage and self-confidence. Of his spirit there remained only the power to fear and the wish to please.

It was plain, too, that his one desire was to please them now. He sat up, and with the tears still upon his face, he began absurdly to wink and smile. He did not eat the honey. Instead he caught up the clothes and started down through the darkness to the harbor beach.

And then another surprise awaited the Four. In a few moments they heard him splashing about out in the water! Yet they might have noticed, for that matter, that though his gnarly arms were of the ruggedness of roots, you could not say that they were dirty. Through all his stay in the bush there had maintained itself in him somehow that queer, deep-down, white man instinct of cleanliness! When at length

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he came back in his new raiment, with choppy beard and hair still dripping, they made up their minds that next time they would remember to provide him with soap and towel. Meanwhile he was jumping about as if that spruce gang no longer existed on the lake. He was wholly the child of three once more.

“And say,” said Tools, “if only he’d had his bow along! If we didn’t find any mounds, on the way down he might have showed us some of that dead-eye shooting that you hear about!”

CHAPTER SIX

THE GREAT BEAR!

THE moon was up. They could not think of running by the shanties till it was down again, and it would not be down for hours. They had practically the whole night to put in, and to begin with they set to work to sort up their stuff, and get it packed for the first stage of the journey home. For one thing they must now arrange their packs so that all four of them could row, and yet leave room for Ninny in the stern.

That well done, they still had several hours ahead of them. They built up the fire, and made Ninny roll in beside it in his sleeping-bag. Jack and Bud and Tools made themselves snug in turn upon the other side. None of them could really think of sleeping. But, in the case of

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Booky, as the moon rose higher and higher, he seemed to be of a "jumpiness" that could not even go through the motions of settling down. "Supposing," he whispered, some time between twelve and one, "supposing I climb that little pine over there, and keep kind of on the lookout? You see, you can't be sure. They might be coming back again."

"All right, old man," they told him; "go ahead!"

The little pine did not give him a view of much more than "Port Arthur" itself. But it was something at least to be able to make sure that no one was stealing up on them in that dead, unnerving silence. In Booky's own words, "It sort of kept the creeps from working the whole way down your back!"

And, after the first minutes, when he had got his night eyes, he began to look around over the island itself.

The right half was one piled-up chaos of

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rocks and rock-growing shrubs and trees, but the left, as he could see it now, dropped down into a sort of wide, bushy, irregular bowl. At the farther end of it the soil must have gathered deeply, just as it had about the foot of that "grand-daddy of pines," now towering above him; for a whole jungle of old fallen trees had piled up there together. The quicksilvery moonlight brought them out uncannily.

Once more Booky's eyes traveled back along the bottom of that "bowl." And then he began to see *something else!*

In those first seconds he did not breathe. He felt a sort of powerlessness which all but let him fall from the tree.

"Jack!" he cried, in a dry, thin voice, "Jack! Come up here!"

"What's the matter?" They all answered him together, starting up in one sudden jerk of speech. "Go on! You're fooling yourself! There's not a sound of anybody!"

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But Jack, for his part, was pulling himself up the tree, hand over hand.

It was no on-creeping spruce cutters that Booky had seen. It was nothing living of any kind. Outlined in that clear black and white of the moon (in the sunlight it might have been lost in the bushes that largely fledged it over) and filling the whole central width of the "bowl," was the rude, mighty, but not-to-be-mistaken mound-effigy of an animal; and the broad, solid, pointed head, the thick, blunt paws, and the absence of a tail, made the resemblance clear and striking to the far-stretching peltry of a great bear.

"And look!" said Booky, as he got the use of speech again; "just out from its nose there — there's another mound — an egg-shaped one! And it's in them that they always find the things!"

"*Well!*" said Jack. "*Well!* This is piling it up, all right!"

They slipped down to give place to Bud

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and Tools. And they, in their turn, hung speechlessly from those upper branches and stared at the marvel.

“We can go down and look it over, anyway!”

“Well, I guess yes! And we’ve got a good two hours yet to dig in!”

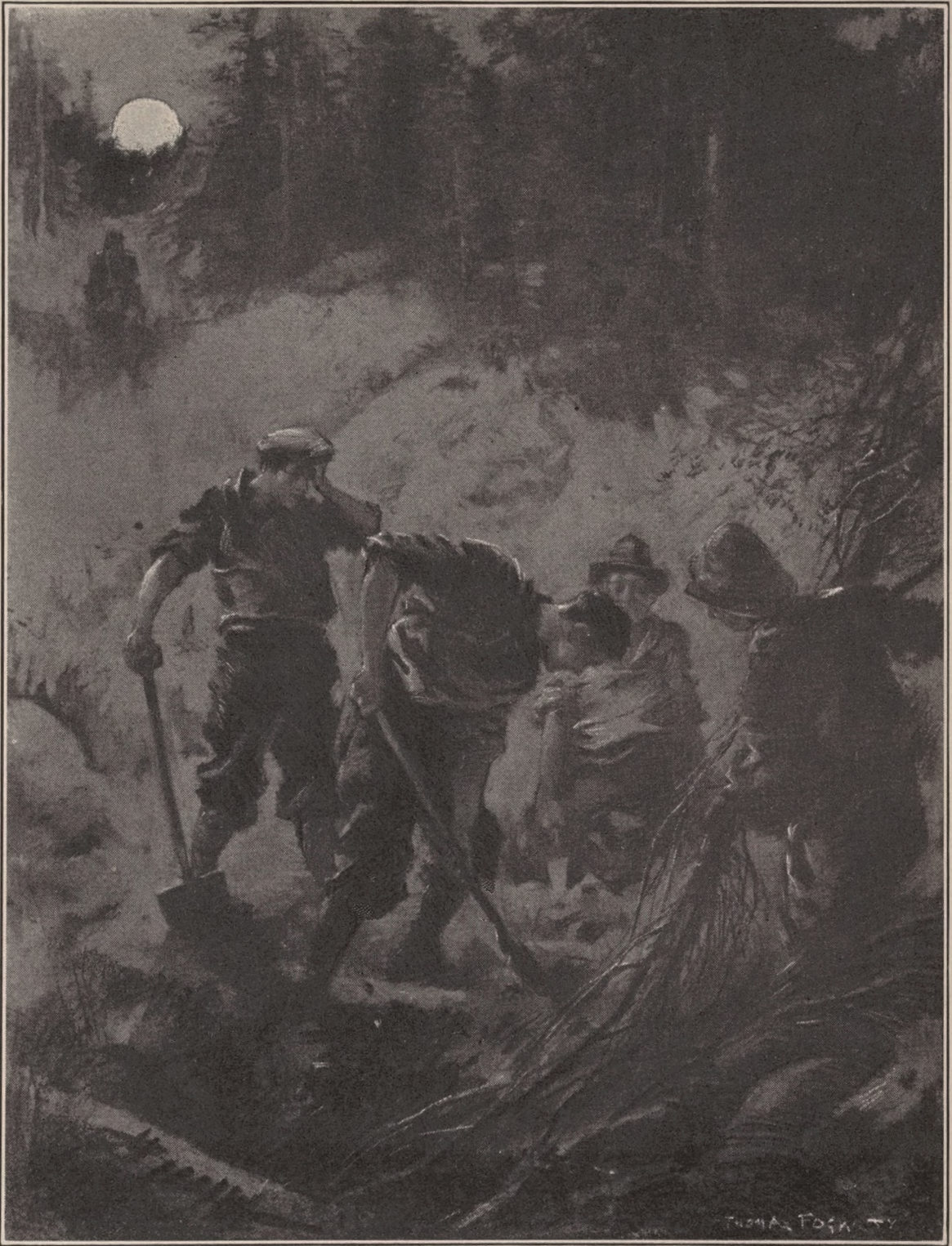
“Under a moon like that, it’s like having electric light!”

They tumbled back to the Twenty-footer, hauled out the spades from the stern sheets, climbed the ridge of rock, and swarmed down into the shaggy depths of the “bowl” at the constant peril of their necks. They climbed along the vast, bristling spine of the effigy; and, when once they were actually upon it, for a time they all but lost belief that it was anything more than a natural earth formation; and then, having followed the head to the nose, they slid down and mounted to the smaller, oval mound in front.

Wherever the soil had come from, that

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smaller mound alone was a good twenty-five feet wide by thirty-five in length. Some big, half-burned pine logs had fallen across it. They had to take each in turn, dig under one side, find a lever, and by main strength pry them over. After his first infinite bewilderment, Ninny helped them with that. And again they saw what a gorilla-like strength he had. Then Jack and Bud went to work with the spades. But, if they were to open the whole mound, they had the task of uncovering a space equal to the cellar area of a large house. And the piercing of that surface mat of rootlets and humus was almost as bad as digging through blue clay. At the commencement they had been full of sore lamentations that they had brought only those two spades with them. At the end of the first hour even Booky was ready to rest a little sooner than Bud was ready to "spell" him again. Yet they had touched only a few square yards in the center. And



Another hour and they were through the second layer. PAGE 95

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in the meantime the moon was descending ever lower and lower.

“We’re not going to get anywhere at all!” said Tools hopelessly. “We’re simply not going to get anywhere at all!”

They did get somewhere. Another hour and they were through the second layer, and by another they were beginning to turn up those first all-significant, all-alluring “ash-streaks.” But alas, by that time the moon was fairly gone!

“Shall I — shall I go for the candle-lantern?” asked Booky.

But he knew only too well that if they were to get by the inlet in the dark of the moon, now was the time for them to start.

“As far as that goes,” said Tools, hardly less ready to fall away from duty, “I dare-say we’d be safe in here for the next two days.”

There was an aching silence.

“Well, what are we going to do about her?” asked Bud, looking at Jack. Jack,

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too, had become a knight of the doleful countenance. But he had kept his moral back a little stiffer. "I guess you've as much right to settle that as I have," he said. "But you mind we promised them down home that no matter how many mounds we found, Some One Else was always going to stand first. Maybe we would be safe enough in here. It's ten to one we would. The thing is, have we any right to take the chance?"

Yet it was to be Ninny himself who settled the question. His strange, woods-sharpened instincts told him, in some way, that they were talking about him. And probably he believed that they were planning to leave him there. For suddenly he began to fill with all his old terrors again. "Ninny's a good feller!" he whispered. "Ninny's a fine feller!" And he reached out and tried miserably to take hold of them.

Then they hesitated no longer.

"Yes! Yes, Ninny, you're right, you are!"

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“You’re the best feller on the lake!”

“And we won’t run any risks of letting them get you again for all the mounds on earth!” (It was Booky who said that, too.)

Bud, the taciturn, began to gather up the spades and trowels. “And anyway, it’s something that we know how to fool those spruce-gangers.”

They got themselves slowly and painfully out of the “bowl,” picked their way down to the Twenty-footer, and once more began to load up.

Ninny, now that he could really feel he was to go along, appeared to accept everything they did, however seemingly erratic, as the one right and logical thing to do. He settled himself importantly in the stern. They pushed off, poled their way through those half-sunken root-logs to the harbor mouth, and so, yard by yard, on through the “labyrinth” into the lake.

The moon had gone down. It was a

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virtual certainty that even the most vengeful of the gang had long since been overcome by slumber. But on the chance, slight as it was, that a sentinel had been put out, they kept well over toward the Reservation shore.

There was no sign of a watcher. They passed the point of the inlet and came in sight of the shanties. The big low buildings blocked themselves out black and motionless in the surrounding gloom. There was neither fire without nor light within. And the Four reached out and gave each other the grip. There were other summers to come, and maybe they would be able to get back and dig below those ash-streaks yet! Meanwhile they had rescued Ninny and fooled those spruce-gangers, and in three minutes more they would be in the full current of their old Wantebec again.

Three minutes more! But, as Jack turned and peered ahead to get his bearings,

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his eye caught a shadow stretching athwart the narrows — a shadow, and yet there was now no moon!

They drew steadily nearer, and saw, moreover, that it was a shadow unlike all ordinary shadows on the water; it was absolutely unmoving!

And then—as, barely in time to avoid a head-on smash, they swung the Twenty-footer around, in dismay — they made out what that shadow was. It was the boom. That great, six-hundred-foot chain of logs, which they had seen swinging from the west bank on the way up, had been carried directly across the river mouth. It still remained riveted to the sheer, upstanding rock of that west bank by a huge iron staple, cemented into the granite. No earthly possibility of a portage on that side! And the other end of the boom had now been brought over and made fast to the landing directly in front of the shanties!

“Oh, they’ve done us!” said Tools, and

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let his oar drop. "If we tried it on there, the noise'd bring out the whole nest of them just in one half jiffy!"

The thing was as effective as if the lengths of chain which linked the separate logs of the boom together had been fastened about the limp and weary ankles of those four oarsmen themselves. They were prisoners; and only in that minute did they seem to realize how weary they were. They had not only been checkmated; they were physically fagged out. They had had no sleep; they had been digging for hours; and they had been rowing for miles. The air on the lake was misty and raw and cold. And their every muscle felt as if it had been pounded with a mason's maul. Ninny, who till then had sat fully trusting in the stern, gave a little whimper of misery — fearing he knew not what. Even the Twenty-footer herself appeared to knock her strakes against the logs in fathomless despondency.

"Yes, they've got us!" said Booky.

THE GREAT BEAR!

“We certainly can’t stand them off for long in daylight,” echoed Tools.

“Oh, I don’t know!” said Jack, and he set his teeth on it. “I sort of think ‘Port Arthur’ might be good to stand a siege! This looks to me like our chance to finish up with the Great Bear!”

CHAPTER SEVEN

RESERVATIONERS AGAIN

WE'LL know better where we're at," said Jack again, "when we've had about a straight twelve hours of sleep."

And the first thing they did when they were back in "Port Arthur" at last was to take it. They could have fallen over and slept in the boat. And as it was, they had no thought of waiting to raise the tent. Rolling themselves under the cedars in their big gray blanket bags — and now Ninny rolled himself in his as a matter of course — they were conscious of nothing more till they were awakened by the heat of the midday sun.

Even then Jack refused to go into any projects of defense until they had further-

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more set themselves right to the extent of a good square meal.

That duly eaten, they were all little short of amazed to note how the complexion of their position seemed somehow to have changed.

“For one thing,” said Booky, “they don’t know we’re in here. And we know from our own experience it’s the last place on the lake they’ll ever happen on by accident.”

“And for all we know, boss Hallewell may be back and in control again, right while we’re sitting here.”

“And when he does get back, you can bet that boom won’t stay there long!”

Jack did not seem to be counting on that, however. He was now leader indeed. He had become so without discussion, and solely because several years of doing almost a man’s work had fitted him for the responsibility. And he had already been taking a rapid look over “Port Arthur” from within.

The island covered not less than five

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acres, and it was a big broken ridge of rock and jungle. Save for the hollow of the bowl (and it was hard enough to keep away from the Great Bear even for the present), almost from the foot of the grand-daddy of pines, the granite, overgrown with hazel and raspberry bushes, cedars and spruces, rose and fell in a series of log-strewn ledges and *crevasses* and rock-heads; the most striking of the latter shall be spoken of separately later on. Jack now suggested that they get into the Twenty-footer and take another look at "Port Arthur" from the outside.

Its encircling wall of granite lifted itself so sheerly up from the water — upon an average to a height of ten or fifteen feet — and it had been polished so smooth by countless centuries of spring floods that only at one place at the north end did it seem possible for it to be scaled. They turned the Twenty-footer back to the narrow, granite-pillared entrance to their harbor again.

RESERVATIONERS AGAIN

“I guess, Tools,” said the new commander, “we’ll have to make you chief engineer of the defense. Here’s your real chance to bring on some of those little ideas of yours. We can use a few of them right now!”

Tools reddened a little, with the modesty of genius. “Well, if you want to know,” he said, “only I suppose you’ll think it’s pretty crazy — I had a sort of one on the way out. I guess, though, it mostly came from that Bruce-and-the-Spider story. But, I was thinking if we choked up this little bottle-neck place with some of those old drift logs back there, and made it look as if they’d stuck in it just by chance, I don’t believe anybody’d ever suspect that we were in here at all!”

For a beginning, that was undoubtedly an idea! In all modesty, it made Bruce and the spider look like amateurs! And no matter what other measures for the defense they took, that was going to be the first.

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Half a dozen logs would do it; and they would jam together and anchor themselves. Before they had really got to work, Tools had another idea. If they arranged most of those logs root inward, it would make them jam better; while, at the same time, to "uncork their bottle," if ever they needed to, they would only have to bend a rope about the roots of the middle one and pull away with the oars.

It was easy work. They did it rapidly. And they were just about to run that key-log into place, when a sort of multiplied "Huh!" of satisfaction brought their heads up with a jump. The same four canoe-loads of young Indians who had visited them at their mainland camp were now pushing suavely up the channel!

How they had found the "Argue-nots" in their present enforced retirement the latter never knew. But the swarthy young gentlemen inherited eyes quite capable of following the Twenty-footer through the

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labyrinth by a dozen broken rushes or a day-old wake of bubbles. And now, as if on invitation, they threaded their way through the all but stoppered bottle-neck, and made for the camp.

With the boys there was nothing for it but follow them. As for Ninny, even had the Four not known it, it would have been plain that again he was in the presence of those who for too long had been his torturers. Again fear seemed to take him like an ague. He tried to get out of the boat before she had made the beach by jumping to a little outlying rock; but the stern of the nearest birch-bark switched in, and with a snake-like quickness a young Reservationer reached out, nipped him by the heels, and dropped him face down upon the stone. Whereupon all his fellows laughed till they could hardly get themselves ashore.

With a miserable, placating smile Ninny picked himself up, his forehead bleeding,

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and slipped terrifiedly away. As soon as he was out of sight he could be heard fleeing as from the plague.

In spite of many inward resolutions to keep the peace, the Four were ready to do battle on the spot. But, for Ninny's best interests in the end, the only course open to them was to rid themselves of their visitors at the earliest possible moment and get back to their work.

And the opportunity seemed to offer itself at once. In the first canoe were those four bows which the boys had promised that they might look at. Now they were produced and held out to them. Jack took one look at his fellows, and saw that they were all of a single mind with him. The bows, too, being made by the old men of the tribe, were good, big, business-like looking weapons.

"All right," he said; "it's a go — we'll take them. But we don't want anything else. Dig up two dollars, Booky,

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so we won't have to keep them waiting around."

And Booky, as treasurer, began to get out the money. He had all but paid it over, when the Reservation leader turned to Tools. With an impudence which made the boys almost doubt if they had heard aright — "You wan' one, too?" he asked.

"Do I want one, too?"

"Sure! Two dolla' each!"

"Well, of all the nerve! And as if you hadn't said fifty cents about ten times over, besides!"

"Fifty cent' for the arrow!"

"All right!" said the "Argue-not" treasurer, intensely; "all right! It's a good thing, Mr. Man, that you let us know in time!" And thereupon Booky put the money back into his pocket.

For the time the disposal of those bows came to a decided halt.

With a countenance quite indescribably changed, the young Indian turned to Bud.

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“You give two dolla’,” he suggested foolishly.

“Yes!” And for once the slow, unspeaking Bud found voice. “Yes! I will in about a million years! Come on, fellows, we’ve got something a little better to do than to stand chewing here any longer. Here, you lads could see we were busy when you came in. And if you wanted to make a sale, you didn’t need to come all the way into camp, at that! So you just chase out again now, and get a move on to where you started for!”

“Good for you, Buddy!” whispered Tools.

“One dolla’, then?”

“If you want to sell them at all,” said Jack, “you take them out and put them on the logs at the entrance there. We’ll hand you over the two dollars when you’re through, and on the other side. And if you come back again, you’ll get a chance later on to do some talking to the proper authorities about what became of two of

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our trolling lines and a box of gimp hooks!”

Whereupon, rather to the surprise of the boys themselves, the remainder of the interview was concluded in the next five minutes.

“But they went away sore, all right,” said Booky. “You’ll see they’ll be back again.”

“Well, we won’t trouble any,” said Tools. “After the way they started in on Ninny like that right at the first go off, they deserved to be thrown out by the neck!”

That visit had, however, served to give them another “idea.” Now that their whereabouts was known to that Reservation band — and it would be easy for them to hoist their light birch-barks over that bottleneck entrance any time they chose to — the boys realized that they would have a much more comfortable feeling if they had some back-door exit in addition. And there was that one low place at the north end, which might well be made to serve the purpose.

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Accordingly, on her next trip out to the jam, the Twenty-footer contained only Jack and Tools. They towed the key-log into place from the outside: and then, being left on the outside, they punted around to the north and met the other two at that back door. Booky, perhaps from memories of *Ivanhoe*, insisted on calling it their sally port.

Whatever they called it, there was work to do on it. In the first place, they were not going to leave the Twenty-footer in the water. Ninny had at length come timorously and shamefacedly back to them. And they were glad for his sake that they now had a job that he could help them with. It would serve to give the poor fellow some countenance again.

Booky and Bud passed lines down to the two in the boat. They ran them through the bow and stern rings. Then they clambered out, and having been helped in the rocky climb, joined the other three in the

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business of hoisting the Twenty-footer after them. In a few minutes they had her up and all but hidden under the cedars. In the hour that followed, they sorted and transferred to her a good half of their supplies. And now in case of dire necessity they could abandon their camp altogether, make for their floating home, swing her in — if she shipped a little water, what of that? — and once more have at least the freedom and the leeway of the lake. They knew that no canoe or *chaloupe* existed that could overtake them then.

But the low place at the sally port must itself be put into a state of security. And here, again, they saw that they could not do better than avail themselves of the resources which nature had left ready to their hands. From the rocks above the port, they worked loose some of the criss-crossing jungle of charred logs — Ninny's muscles doing as much almost as those of all four of them — slid them down root

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first, and forced them together, just as they had done with the logs at the bottle-neck, only here they were working on the rock instead of on the water. The shore itself was not more than three or four feet high, but the long ragged roots, standing out and upward over it, made a landing almost impossible. Once more, too — and this was always the great point — there was nothing to tell those spruce men that the bristling, irregular *chevaux de frise* was not entirely the work of nature herself. As for the Twenty-footer, by using their extra coil of rope she could be let down anywhere where it was not too high for them to follow in a sliding drop.

Stopping only for a cold bite — though it was a big one — they went on to work out a third idea. This one Tools had had long before they had made a job of the first and second. That grand-daddy of pines could be turned into the most superlative of look-outs, or crow's-nests.

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As was evident at once, the great pine could not be climbed by the use of Jack's spurs alone. A girth line — an old wrinkle in the woods — would have to be used as well, but it was Tools' particular idea to use both spurs and girth line only once.

"Here's where old Job's 'six-inchers' do certainly come in," he said. "Jocky, old man, if you take the hand axe, and both pockets full of spikes, and drive 'em in zigzag as you go up — you know how they do it on telegraph poles — we'll simply have one of those aerial stairways that you read about."

Jack as the practical member even improved on that, since the thickness of the bark made the holding strength of the six-inchers somewhat problematical, for each one he cut a notch, though not deep enough to let it come out white. He kept them all on the one side of the tree, too, so that they could be seen only from the north, if, indeed, they could be seen

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from anywhere beyond the island. And after he had caught the knack of putting his spurs into such a leviathan of trees, and of trusting to the good doubled half-inch hemp that looped the small of his back to the huge barky circumference, and of using that little axe so that he could get the maximum of power behind it, he began to go up hand over hand.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE KEEP AND THE MOUND

THERE are certain things which, after our first cold gasp, teach us anew that it is unsafe to leave to the malignity of chance any slightest margin whatever.

When Jack had got perhaps three-quarters of the way to the top, suddenly he stopped. For a moment he lay back on his girth-line, as motionless as if he had been part of the tree; then letting the axe-head drop into his pocket, he went up the rest of the way at almost racing speed, and as he disappeared under the first big brushy branch, and jerkingly unknotted himself, the three boys on the ground began to understand.

Faintly but with growing distinctness voices came in to their ears. Could they

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have had the same use of their eyes, they would have seen that as they stood there open-mouthed a *chaloupe* full of spruce men was entering the labyrinth.

Sitting up there astride a kind of saddle branch, Jack could see that, as if led and directed, they were coming straight for "Port Arthur" and the bottle-neck. Indeed, until he heard their first words, he had no doubt at all that they had one of those young Indians for a guide.

"I tell ye 'twas the sound av choppin'." — That was the voice of Irish Mike.

"An' I tell youse it was on'y one o' them big yalla woodpeckers. They got a strikin' power that'd drive piles."

They came on for another dozen boat lengths.

"Well, I begin to belave ye." Reflected by the water, every word echoed up to the crow's-nest with that amazing clearness noticed by aeronauts. "But, begobs, if it was as ye say, I'd still hould, niver-the-

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less, that the top av that big three is the place to spy thim from. Yis, me bhoys, an' if we can't put eyes on thim anny other way, I'll go in, an' climb it for ye yet."

The laugh was a general but not a good-natured one.

"By gare, I teenk you won't climb heem!" This came from one of the French Canadians.

"I tell ye, wid a good lingth av half-inch, and a clove hitch inty her" (Jack had to take hold of his saddle-bow) "I'd go up it now in a brace of shakes."

By this time they were abreast of the jam.

"An', bagosh, 'ow you know w'ich h'isl-and he's growin' h'on?"

Obviously they took the bottle-neck for a former through channel.

"More'n that, how would you get in?" demanded another of the gang, as if the question were one of tremendous profundity.

"I'd schwim in, if nade be."

"Ah, I teenk dey be gone down riv'," a

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third "Canajun" expressed himself, discouragedly.

"An' I ask ye ag'in, how could they git down riv'? Gobs, if ye're for givin' up the hunt alriddy, I'm not urg'in' ye. I tell ye ag'in as I told ye in the beginnin', we'd be a hape sight more sinsible to hade thim no more, an' sit at home at ease. I'm thinkin' ye'll meet the boss before ye meet Ninny ag'in."

Then Cash-down, who could hardly support himself in his place in the stern, showed what the main agent was in their crazy persistence in the pursuit. He held up a wobbly hand as one who takes the solemnest of oaths: "We're goin' t' find the mut — we're goin' t' find him, and make him finish that bottle — yes, sir, an' the same fer them four beggarin' little whipp-snappers — if we got t' row, an' row, an' row, an' row till the ol' boats give out. Ain' — ain' that right, fellers?"

"Shu-rure!"

THE KEEP AND MOUND

“*Vraiment!*”

“Right yuh are, Cash, an’ all we’re sayin’ is that we’ve done our share of rowin’ fer to-day. We’re not givin’ up. Not fer Jo we ain’t! All we’re sayin’ is, it’s back to the case goods fer ours till tomorr’ again.”

With the big Irishman standing unsteadily amidships, and still protesting his intention “to climb the ould tree in the ind,” they slowly turned the *chaloupe* in the hindering rush-beds, and once more began to find an uncertain way back to the main channel.

“I know one thing,” said Bud, “after this we don’t do any shooting with the Twenty-two up here.”

“No,” said Jack, and they remembered afterward that he said it a little queerly, “I guess what pot-hunting we do now will be done with our bows and arrows.”

And, under the galvanism of that most uncomfortable of hours, they began to see

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what they could do toward adding still further to their defenses. There was not much that they could do. But there was one thing.

We spoke some time ago of a certain Port Arthur "rockhead" that was to be mentioned more particularly later on. It was to the left of the camp. And, but for a sort of ledge or sill about eight feet up, on that campward face it could hardly have been climbed. The top of the diminutive crag was roughly hollow and broken away in the rear, leaving the front like a rampart, and now, by using small stumps and all the loose pieces of stone in the vicinity of camp, the boys were able to wall in the back of their barbican with a low barricade that turned it into a sort of conning-tower.

What did give the ridiculous little fortress an actual semblance of strength was the fact that it was cut off from the main ridge of "Port Arthur" by a long, zigzagging,

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bush-grown divide in the rock, which Booky was soon christening the "moat."

Correspondingly, that conning-tower fortress was itself christened the "keep," and if in their heart of hearts the Four had a plentiful lack of confidence in either, at any rate they were something, and they made the most of it.

If you are in a position where you have every need to keep your courage up, there are two things you can do. You can resolve to keep it up, which may possibly prove efficacious, or you can find something to do which will keep you so busy that you will have no time to do any thinking or resolving whatsoever.

As a commander, Jack was by nature of the latter school. As far as that night was concerned, they were weary enough to sleep without the need of any one's advising them. They got away with supper, took an evening plunge in the harbor, made

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a few arrows, and then, without more ado, turned in.

Next morning Jack announced that unless there were any votes to the contrary they would again get busy at the "Great Bear."

While breakfast was cooking Tools pulled himself up to the crow's-nest. He came down to announce "nothing moving, but the boom still there."

"So is ours," said Bud, looking out to the bottle-neck.

They got their spades and trowels, and made for the bowl. Again they felt as they had felt when first they entered it, criss-crossed in every direction as the big hollow was by those charred and fallen logs, and covered above them with that thick green fleece of berry-bushes, it was more than doubtful if their discovery would ever have been made but for Booky's bird's-eye view in the moonlight.

"And maybe," now suggested that same

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first authority on mounds, "maybe if we take a good look around before we begin to dig this morning we'll find something else that's just as much worth while."

They found nothing — at least it seemed nothing worth while then; the time was soon to come when they were to consider it something very much worth while indeed. This was a little fall-away in the shore-side rim of the bowl, half concealed in the cedars under a great screen of fox grapes. Up those fox grapes — providing that one of those looped and ropy fox-grape vines was lowered down to him — a person might readily climb from the water. Booky wanted to believe that this was a secret passage known only to those great chiefs and medicine men who no doubt came to the Great Bear by night to practise sacred rites. But by now the others were of the opinion that it was about time they were getting busy and practising a few rites with spade and trowel.

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The egg-shaped, or altar mound, lifted itself some six or seven feet above the level. They had found those ash-streaks between three and four feet down. They intended to dig scientifically. According to Dr. Gordon the first laws of science were thoroughness and care, and they went to work with system.

There was no point in making a little hole, or a lot of holes, at random. Now that they had got down to that red-gray veiny stratum in the center, before they went deeper they would try to lay it bare in all directions, for it could not underlie the entire mound. According to Booky if this mound was to be like almost every other that had ever been investigated, somewhere beneath those ash-streaks would their finds be made.

The ash stratum extended some eight feet north and south and some ten feet east and west. At one time, therefore, it must have been a bed on which had burned

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a pyre capable of roasting a moose. In the very center they met with cakey layers that had become almost a fire-clay. In more regular layers, too, they found a great number of flat stones which had plainly been cracked into pieces by the heat. What purpose they had served originally who could tell? The boys cleared them carefully away, along with the clayey earth.

They were now using the trowels, or indeed their hands, much more than they were the spades, for there was one thing they were determined not to do, and that was to destroy anything in its discovery. Presently they began to turn up their first bits of broken pottery, and flint chips, and half-worked quartzite.

After that they broke up every big piece of earth between their fingers. Nothing whatever was going to escape them. One of the logs which they had moved from the middle of the mound was flattish toward the root and not omitting even the smallest

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fragment, they laid everything together upon that.

“I hereby christen it the original Major Maggs’ Great Bear Island Museum,” said Booky, stopping for a moment to take breath.

“You come along here,” said Jack, “and Ninny, too — but where is Ninny?”

Ninny had disappeared.

“He’s likely over at the other side of the island after berries,” said Tools. For it must be confessed that when Ninny had worked as much as he felt was good for a wild man’s health he had a habit of going off for a much needed rest.

“All right,” said Jack; “And Booky, this is what I was wanting you for. It’s a big rock, seems to be the size of a pumpkin. You can put some of your superfluous energies to helping me loosen it up and get it out.”

It was a smooth rock, but the earth had taken firm hold of it, and its rounded

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sides afforded no possible gripping surface. "If I try prying her with the spade," said Jack again, "I might smash something in close beside her. We'll have to dig her clearer yet with the trowels." They had been working hardly ten seconds when, as if with the same feeling, both sat back and looked at each other almost gasping. Then Booky bent forward again, cleared the plastered dirt from the top of that stone, and rapped upon it with the handle of his trowel. It was hollow.

CHAPTER NINE

THE TWENTY-TWO

AND it isn't any stone, either," Booky cried; "it's some sort of great big pot, placed upside down — that's what! It's rough enough, — it's all out of true, — but that's what it is!"

By this time the other two were kneeling beside it, and for five minutes they all burrowed like hypnotized terriers.

When they were almost at the bottom, they had to open the hole still wider, for either that huge inverted pot was resting on something, or it had some kind of saucer-like lid. Not till all was clear could they lift it out, and then they saw that the thing at the bottom was a lid.

But they would not have taken it off —

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at any rate, not then — had not the tug of getting it from the ground loosened it in spite of them. They could see that it had been made practically air-tight by a sort of wax, or gum. Red-spruce gum it might have been, though it was black and harsh and brittle now. And, when the lid had come away of itself, there was no good reason why they should not go on and examine the contents.

Inside, there was first a heavy layer of dry, dry birch-bark. Beneath this, or, if you looked at it from the way in which the pot had been buried, above this, there lay a rough, uneven disk of hammered copper. It was now oxidized to a vivid green, but there could still be made out upon it a clearly cut representation or totem sign of that great bear mound itself. And the chemical action of the salts of copper had also served to preserve the thing which for ages had been resting on that copper disk.

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This was something large and heavy and oval-shaped. It had been most closely and curiously wrapped in a coarse, pigment-marked fabric that might well have been taken for present-day sacking, or burlap. Perhaps its color had once been a sacerdotal white, but the passing of how many centuries had changed it to the coffee-stained hue of mummy swathings. The Four undid it with a feeling of awe and reverence. Inside, egg-white and hard, and as perfect as when it had been placed there, was a huge bear's skull.

They could do nothing for a time but let their arms drop and stand gaping at it. Then with all the care they could they wrapped it up again, and carried everything with infinite precaution to the broadest part of their "museum log." They had felt a little played out before. Now they felt equal to working without a break for the next two days.

"But just before we do pitch in again,"

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said Tools, "maybe I'd better take another look around from the crow's-nest."

He had little more than got himself to the top of the bowl, when he stopped short. He had almost walked into half a dozen of their Reservation visitors of the day before, who had silently mounted the path from camp. At the same instant the first of them caught sight of that "museum log."

Now, that there may be no misunderstanding as to the situation and what was swiftly to grow out of it, you must know that never had there been any claim, direct or fanciful, that the Reservation extended to those Lunge Lake islands. Major Maggs could have been named as their present owner by about every young Indian who paddled the lake in birch-bark. For the matter of that, their own tribe were much more truly newcomers in the spruce country than the white men were themselves.

The ancient and forgotten people who had piled up that Great Bear mound were

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nearer of kin to the Aztecs than they were to that party of prowlers on the edge of the bowl, and very well did the latter know it. But for years they had had a most profitable market for relics, and that anyone else should discover any was not to be borne. They might be content to take trolling lines and gimp hooks only by stealth, but the things which they now beheld with fury on that log they were resolved to seize at once and violently. Springing down into the bowl, two of them made for it with snarls of challenge.

Luckily the first log that the Four had had to move lay on its roots between, and acted as a bulwark. The "Argue-nots" in their turn sprang out of the pit, flung themselves forward to man that bulwark, and hold those first assailants off.

It resulted only in bringing others fiercely to their assistance. At the same time they jerked their heads over their shoulders and sent a sort of summoning war-cry across

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the island. It was plain that there were still more "Reservationers" than had yet appeared.

And no sooner was that evident to Jack than he slid down the further side of the mound, and flew through the bowl for camp. "I'll be right back, fellows," he cried, "I won't be a minute."

But he did not get back a second before there was every need of him. A round dozen young Indians had come up on the run. In another moment they would have taken the defenses on the leap and no doubt having taken them, they would have handled the defenders very evilly. But now Jack came right through them.

To tell the truth they opened up to let him through, and the next minute the other boys saw why. In his hands he carried the Twenty-two.

During the moments which immediately ensued, the raiders in front began to go

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through the form of parleying: "Give ten dolla'."

"Yes, start that again — do."

"Give five dolla'." Their front line, as if unconsciously, had by degrees been extending itself.

"Five dollars for leave to dig, no doubt, and every man jack of you mighty well knows that Major Maggs — Look out, Jocky! Look out!"

The young rascals on the left were all jumping the log together.

"Get back, now! Get back with you!" Jack covered the "museum" with a shout. "I'll just give you another five seconds."

But, in getting back, they had managed to draw off the defenders' entire attention. The latter had only time to turn, and meet another and a vastly more dangerous rush from the other flank. Had not Bud and Tools thrown themselves in front, Jack would have lost his gun.

As it was, there followed two minutes of

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desperate rough and tumble. But the gun remained the deciding factor. You may have your man down, but if one of his friends is in a position at any moment to use you as a target you very quickly let him up again. Jack swung the Twenty-two first this way, then that. "If you make me shoot, now," he cried, "if you make me shoot! And, mind, I don't want to."

They had no faintest desire to make him shoot. In twos and threes, they melted before him, and leaped back to their own side again.

More than that, the felonious young band had now exhausted all the tactics known to their none-too-active brains. A simultaneous assault from front and rear would doubtless have been their final attempt, but the presence of the pit behind the boys put that out of the question.

They were beaten, they had met their "stand-off" — for the present, and they wasted little time making up their minds to

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that themselves. Grinning a vicious acknowledgment of the situation, they gradually backed away toward the harbor again. Needless to say, the camp was at their mercy, but, to the boys, the "museum" now seemed much the more important, and they stayed by it. They remained where they were till, finally, the splash of canoe-bottoms, hitting the water on the flat (and from the deceiving echoes one might have believed that some of the canoes had been launched at the north end of the island), gave notice that their visitors had portaged out over the dam again, and were gone.

They were gone, but none of the Four was so simple as to comfort himself for a moment with any belief that the incident was closed.

"They'll only be back again to try to jump us to-night," said Bud, "that's what they did with that South Falls party — and the bunch from Green Harbor."

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“Not much doubt of it, I’m afraid,” said Jack. “Well, we’ll simply have to do our best to get up some proper sort of reception for them.”

“And, gosh, Jack,” said Booky — “about your bringing out the Twenty-two. It did seem, of course, as if she was the only thing, but do you think you ought to have gone so far as that, you know?”

“Of course,” seconded Tools, “they didn’t make you shoot, but just supposing that they had?”

“Then they’d have had a great deal more power over her than I’ve got.” He lifted the empty breach to the level of their eyes: “Fellows, I might as well own up to it. She’s been plugged again for the last week.”

“No!”

“Say!”

“Oh, Jimmy-o!”

“That’s right. She’s all in for this trip. There’s been about three inches of lead in the middle of her barrel ever since the day

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after I shot the gray squirrel, and that was the only thing that let me think of bringing her out to-day."

They had no language for it. It seemed to put new spirit in them all, and new spirit was a thing of which they now felt every need.

They felt a still greater need of it a scant five minutes later, when Tools in his turn mounted to the crow's-nest. Exploring the headwaters of a heavily wooded bay to the northeast were both *chaloupes*, and there was something diabolically thorough and persistent in their crazy movements, even at that distance. If for a few hours the boys had succeeded in forgetting that spruce gang, manifestly this was a long way from that spruce gang's forgetting them. It was no mere matter of substituting Reservationers for the first enemy. If the gang succeeded in finding them, they could look forward to settling with them both.

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Yet Tools' half hour in the crow's-nest at the same time eased their minds of another burden. Ninny, it will be recalled, had disappeared shortly after they had commenced digging, and to add to their other troubles they had begun to be decidedly bothered about him. But now, a second time Tools began excitedly to wig-wag. There was something moving in the labyrinth away over on the left in the water.

It was Ninny, and, wherever he had been on that riskiest of days, he had not only come back swimming — swimming in shirt and trousers — but he had brought back with him his famous bow and arrows. Wholly careless of the fact that he was shedding water like some huge spaniel, he proudly put his armament on exhibition on the beach.

Much as they would otherwise have wished to, the prospect of what might be in store for them that night gave the boys

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no time to do any admiring then. "Yes, they're fine, Ninny, fine," they said. "We'll look at them a little later on," and then, save for Bud, who in his turn took the crow's-nest watch, they got hurriedly to work.

First they hastened back to the mound, and gathered their museum together, and planted it in a temporary *cache* beneath the big fox-grape vine. Then they started for the bottle-neck, and by this time there was a hopeful but ruthless gleam in the "Argue-not" eye. For, if they were to have a night visit from those Reservationers, Tools, for his part, had already begun to have a few extremely promising ideas. And now, with various things in their hands, they climbed out upon the two little granite headlands which looked down upon their log-filled harbor mouth. In the real Port Arthur, Booky recollected that they were called Golden Hill and Tiger's Tail, and the same names served their purpose

THE TWENTY-TWO

now. Jack worked from one side, and Tools and Booky from the other, and Ninny followed all alike with equal wonder. While they worked, too, still other ideas came to them. Exactly what their nature was need not be told in detail here. Enough to say that they were even more promising than Tools' first had been, and when the three had finished, they could tell themselves that they had gone some way toward making that reception such a reception as any Chippewa surprise party might long remember. They came back to camp and ate supper. Again they were beginning to feel equal to things.

"Well, anyway, we won't do any worrying yet," said Jack.

"No, there's never any sense in doing that," supported the stolid Bud.

"Besides," said Booky, "we always want to remember that even if they do get in and clean out the camp, that's a long way from their cleaning us out, too. All we

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have to do is simply to put for the Twenty-footer."

And then, like a ghost at the feast, the same benumbing, paralyzing thought seemed to take hold of all four of them at once. For an hour, and more than an hour, those young Indians had had the entire run of the island. Now that the boys remembered, too, it might not have been the echoes of *canoe* launching that had come down to them from its northerly shore.

Jack turned about, with the others after him. They sped sickenedly up the rocks and over the main ridge and through the endless maddening tangle of logs and bushes to the sally-port.

The Twenty-footer was gone!

CHAPTER TEN

THE BEAR'S HEAD

EVEN Ninny seemed overwhelmed, but it was Tools who, as the judge's son, spoke first: "That's all right," he said, "that's all right. That's stealing on a penitentiary scale, and now we've got our hold on them."

"If you put it up to me," said Bud, "I'd just as soon have my hold on the boat."

"And what are we going to do?" asked Booky. Instinctively the question was sent in Jack's direction.

"Well," he said grimly, "it's pretty bad, but we've scored once, and they've scored once. They've got our backs up against the wall, I don't know as people fight any the worse for that. If we've got to, we'll go home on a raft." They started slowly back toward the bowl. "And for

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one thing, if the barefaced thieves do come in on us to-night, we can lay ourselves out to score again this time in a way that'll last them till they're bald-headed."

But for the time being they might as well begin to think of something else. Booky elected to take a turn in the crow's-nest. The others built up their fire again.

"And, Ninny," said Jack, "we haven't really had a look yet at that great old bow of yours." It was like their own, one of the regulation, old-style Indian make, winged, and a little less than six feet long. It had no decorations, but it carried the marks of the use it had had, and was as uncouthly formidable a piece of hickory as any one could wish to meet. As for the arrows, Ninny, when in action, carried them in a species of birch-bark quiver at his belt, alongside the old hack-bladed hunting-knife with which he had made them. They were primitive shafts of ash, blunt-headed, unfeathered, and none too straight, but he

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had learned to shoot like Robin Hood with them — his skill had long supplied talk for the spruce camps. And there was that in his wide-open and expectant face as he displayed his weapons now, which called upon the boys to marvel as if they were examining the finest work of a Milanese armourer.

There was this, too: Though Ninny and his bow had been seen many times together, never before had any one else set hand upon it. When he had been drawn to make one of his hapless visits to the Reservation or the spruce camp, he had always left bow and arrows and hunting-knife behind in some ever-changing hiding-place. The fact of his bringing in those treasures to Port Arthur was an unworded declaration to the Four that henceforth his fate lay wholly with their own. And coming at the hour it did there was something to warm their hearts in that.

Tools got the hand-axe and split up a

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big stick of pine. "Now show us how to make some arrows of the right sort for *our* bows," he said.

With a huge importance Ninny got out his knife and began to show them. It would have been idle to pretend that their souls were not beset by manifold fears and anxieties. The loss of the Twenty-footer lay heavy upon them. It is one thing to burn your ships when in the enemy's country, and very much another to have them stolen. They were yet to know, too, what the night had still in store for them.

Of one thing they could be certain: Those Reservationers, if they did come down on them, would come at a time when, ordinarily, they would have been asleep for hours. Those hours they must now put in, and that first night upon the island had taught them how long such hours can be. For lack of anything else to do they went on with their arrow-making, and between the four of them they ended

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by piling up "butt-shafts" enough, if aimed aright, to bring down all the small game in North Wantebec County. They lay in drifts about the fire.

So passed the time till eleven. Then they let their fire die down, divided up, and resolutely made their final dispositions. About half-past one Jack was sitting in the "saddle branch" of the crow's-nest. The sky was blurrily overcast. Hardly a star was visible. And to any one who had not spent the last twenty minutes sharpening his eyes in the darkness, nothing, assuredly, could have been visible upon the dusky expanses of the lake. "If they really are going to come to-night," he told himself — and then he stopped as if a hand had grasped him. A succession of moving objects was even then commencing to enter the western side of the islands, and those lights were coming as silently almost as if they had been the shadows of themselves!

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He stayed only long enough to pull himself together. Then he dropped down that ladder of "six-inchers" to the deserted camp, and sped out along the now well-known path to Golden Hill.

In the bushes, awaiting him, lay Bud, and as soon as Jack had flattened himself beside him, Bud reached out and pulled something. It was a tightly stretched copper wire from the rod-mending kit; but, for the present, it was a signal wire.

And the signal was answered, for, twenty feet across the "bottle-neck," on the end of Tiger's Tail, lay Ninny, Tools, and Booky. Tools was still hopelessly adjuring Ninny that he must keep quiet, no matter what might happen, "and he ought to have done as they asked him, and stayed back there in camp." But Ninny's mouth was now half open. His ears had already picked up the drip of paddles, and he was peering into the channel blackness in an excitement that was almost a palpi-

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tation. Another minute and his whole body seemed to surge together. The Four knew that the moment had come.

One would not have believed that the band could handle their canoes with such stealth and rapidity. While the boys were still straining their eyes to make them out, the first canoe had swung in alongside the jam, her occupants were out of her, lifting her to the logs, and ready to slide her in again upon the harbor side.

To tell the whole story, Jack, who was to begin it, was not quite ready, but that half minute of delay could not have been better timed by the most elaborate planning. The jam was crowded and jostling with young Indians, when there was a light scratch, and, from nowhere, something faintly glowing and spitting dropped among them. The next moment, the whole little gorge was filled with a bomb-like flare, and the horridly dazzling, blue-white lightning-light of one of Tools' magnesium "flashes."

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The visitor under whose feet the bomb had lit leaped straight up into the air, and his face shone out for a single instant. Then, diving like a frog, he went back into the channel. His comrades packed themselves together in one big, kicking clump. And barely could they think themselves once more back in the protection of the darkness when from the end of Tools' bass-line another "magnesium" reached the jam.

At this second bomb one of those Reservationers, doubtless possessed of superior knowledge, did for a moment believe that he knew what it was. "Flish light! Flish light!" he cried. But at that moment, though Jack had not precisely aimed it so, the third bomb found its settling point fairly on top of the explainer's head. He waited neither for the explosion nor to offer further explanations. Before the flash could come he had "frogged" it frantically in his turn, sending

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the water almost to the level of Golden Hill.

Meanwhile that third lurid, fearfully exploding hiss-and-glare was followed by one manifold and squawking howl. Gun-fire would have been understood, and any sort of lightning that was accompanied by thunder. As it was, the mass of them stood there, too wholly unnerved even to be able to take to the water. Seemingly they waited only for death.

What they were given might have been described in storekeeping language as "something just as good." Sliding apparently on nothing at all, though in reality it was suspended from that invisible signal wire, descended the skull from the Great Bear. The jaws had been fastened open, and kept so with more wire. And jaws, teeth, and eye sockets — the whole head, indeed — were all alike livid with one grisly, green-crawling glow. Well they might glow, too, for the phosphorus of a

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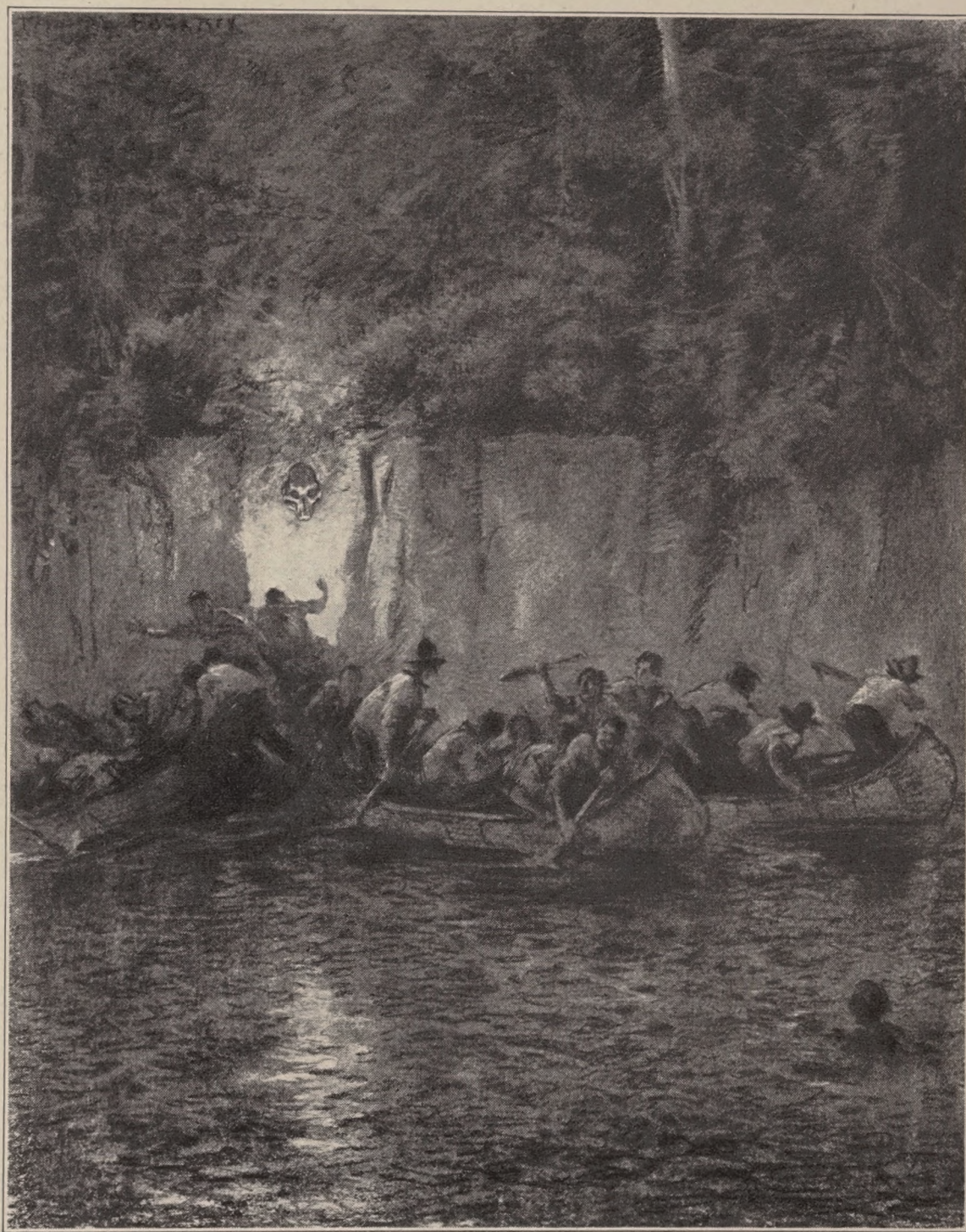
whole box of dampened matches had gone into it. . . .

The wire had been run from a point well back on Golden Hill to a bush far out upon the "Tail," hence it took almost the direction of the gorge itself, and as the skull dipped further and further down, to those huddled, shrieking young Indians, it seemed to be coming directly at them. There was no more foolishly sophisticated talk about "fish lights," then.

But once again Jack was bending far over the little gorge, and "Now!" he whispered, "now!"

In the shadow of his hat Bud lit one last silent match, touched off one single fuse, and at the end of Jack's pickerel line the makings of still one more miniature volcano dropped upon the jam.

This time it was not a magnesium "flash." It was that cone of red fire that Tools had left over from the Fourth. Half-way down, the huge phosphorescent



*Three of the canoes were half filled with the panic-stricken
already. PAGE 155*

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skull had stopped from its own weight, and the red fire "whoofed" out and leaped up almost immediately beneath it.

At first the "Argue-nots" could give little attention to its effect upon their visitors, because of its effect upon one of their own company. Up to then Tools and Booky had between them succeeded in imparting some sort of courage and assurance to Ninny, but at that inexpressibly horrible combination of grinning bear's head and red fire, nothing they could tell him was any longer of avail. He buried his face in a bed of wintergreens and emitted roar upon roar which might truly have been taken for the voice of the offended spirit of the Great Bear itself.

At any rate, that was how it was interpreted now. Three of the canoes were half filled with the panic-stricken already. The one that had been lifted to the logs was jerked, thrust, and hurled back into the water again, and every last young Reser-

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vationer who had not succeeded in getting into the three first to flee now attempted to board this final ark of refuge. As it fled down the channel they were still pulling themselves gibberingly over its gunwales, and for the succeeding half hour the whole band could be heard yelling a terror that grew rather than decreased, as, bereft of all sense of direction by their panic, they blundered fearfully in and out of those doubly blind alleys of the labyrinth.

Until almost the last yell had died away, Ninny kept his face in that muffle of winter-green and rock moss, and his hands locked about his head. But when those yells had begun to die away, and, by uncovering first one ear and then the other he could be doubly certain of it, when, in addition, he looked down into the bottle-neck and saw that one sense confirmed the other and his enemies were entirely scattered, then Mr. Ninny Noggins, wild man, underwent the most amazing of transformations.

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He rose to his full height and shook his hairy countenance after the departed with an expression of blood-curdling ferocity. He ran out to the very verge of the rock and kicked after them, and it was such a kick as, had any of them remained behind, must have removed them from off the face of the earth. In fact it was plain that the idea Ninny wished to convey was that in reality it was he who had put those Reservationers to flight. Nor did he hesitate to throw out the broadest hints, truculently aimed in the direction of these spruce gangers, that if they, too, would only come on, now, an even more awful fate would be in store for them. Then, as they still continued to cower in their lair, Ninny let himself go in mocking and triumph over them in a mounting, martial dance of victory.

The Four gradually worked him back to camp. They had little thought of dissembling their own feelings at the way the

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night had gone. It had been both magnificent and a great deal better than war. In five minutes one enemy had probably been settled with for the next month. It made them feel almost as if they had finished with the spruce gang, too. They piled wood on their fire, and gave each other the grip, and went revelling back over it all again and again and again.

But to Ninny, nothing could have been more inadequate; what was the use of winning a victory so unparalleled, indeed, if you didn't know how to celebrate it accordingly.

Talked out at last, the boys rolled themselves in their sleeping-bags and turned in. A week ago they would have been unable to sleep, but now, in another half hour, they were sleeping too deeply even to dream. Filling them was that most goodly of sensations which comes to us when, having been thrown wholly upon our own resources, we begin to find that with a little

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confidence those resources may be made entirely equal to our need. Meanwhile, round and round the fire went Ninny, in something which must have been very like the arm-flinging, high-kicking, ecstatically triumphant performance with which those Reservationers would doubtless have celebrated their own victory had they only won it.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

MUSEUM AND FORTRESS

AND when, late next morning, Bud, Tools, and Booky sleepily unrolled themselves, Jack was nowhere to be seen. A few minutes later, however, he showed himself. He had three fair-sized bass, caught with bacon scraps from above the "secret passage," and he now began to get them ready for the pan.

He had already been up in the crow's-nest, too. The boom was still there; otherwise all was serene.

They set to work to get breakfast. Considering that half their supplies had gone with the Twenty-footer, and in spite of every resolve not to think about it, the memory of her loss came back upon them almost hourly, they might well begin to use their rods again. It was a question indeed

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if they wouldn't be wise to save the scant two or three pounds of bacon they still had left, for bait, and it was only by one lucky chance in ten that the bass would bite at it. The judge's famous pilot biscuits, too, had now begun to come in very opportunely. The sole afflicting thought was that two whole lockers full of them were gone with the Twenty-footer.

There were compensations, however: If the boom was still there, no *chaloupes* were in sight, and while the Four meant in no way to relax the regularity of their visits to the crow's-nest, everything indicated that they might count on another, and this time an almost care-free, day at the Great Bear.

They found nothing more that could compare with that first unexampled pot and its contents; they would have been asking much had they expected to. But what they did find was in a state of preservation that gave it a treble value.

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For the most part the pottery in such mounds is either crushed by the weight of earth above it, or, in time, becomes gradually softened and rotted by the dampness of the soil. In the case of that egg mound in front of the Great Bear, the layer of stones the boys had found, and under them that stratum of natural fire-clay, had acted as vaulting and water-shed together. Of the seven small pots which they took out in the course of that day's digging, five were absolutely intact, and the two which were broken could very easily be fitted together again.

Unlike the big one, too, which had apparently been molded for strength alone, the little pots all showed some rude and primitive attempt at decoration. This might consist of little more than bands of dotting and saw-tooth and diamond work, but they served to establish the fact that the people who raised those mounds were almost certainly northern. The curved line in such pottery decoration is peculiarly

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the sign manual of such mound-building tribes as have emigrated from the south.

Inside those little pots and around them, they found a wealth of other things. There were beads of copper, of catlinite, of blue quartz, and of some sort of reddish stone. The same reddish stone appeared again in a large, plain pipe head. There were three other pipes, found together in the biggest of the unbroken pots, and they had evidently been made to represent some animal. Very probably they, too, were effigies of the Great Bear. And an amulet of soapstone might have been meant for either a bear or a bird. The mound-builders were not the most realistic of artists, but they did well enough.

Shortly after noon Ninny, who all morning had been in a state of the greatest exultation, disappeared again.

"But his bow's here yet," said Jack, who went back to investigate, "so no doubt he'll be around all hunky by the next meal

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hour. Very likely he's got another 'sprise' for us."

And, it may here be said, never did anyone prophesy more truly.

But they had got to work at their mound again. There were two splendid specimens of "toggle-heads," those long, eye-holed, many-barbed shafts of flint, which seem to have been used in hunting exactly as the detachable head of a harpoon is used to-day. Plain, ordinary flints and "celts" and arrow-heads there were in dozens. It was as if almost every important member of the tribe had laid some token on the bed of the mound before the main layer of earth had been spread upon it and the fire set burning.

There were stone axes, the heads of hammers and war clubs, gouges of argillite, bored pendants or sinkers, little chert disks, drills and chippers, knives and scrapers, and as many more of those prehistoric implements which we name only by guessing at

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their use. Even those capacious new cabinets of the Club museum would not be enough for them. Tools all but wore out his camera making photographs. He carried it to the top of the crow's-nest to get a series of bird's-eye views. Reservationers, spruce men, the stolen Twenty-footer, Ninny himself — all were for the time forgotten.

Nor was it difficult for the Four to know when they had exhausted that inestimable treasure house. Virtually everything found came from the same level. Beneath that level, any one who had dug so much as a post-hole could see that the soil — and in several places they touched the rock — had never been disturbed. The circle, too, within which that treasury had been established, was scarcely less cleanly marked and limited. By the end of the afternoon they had no longer any possible ground for hoping that by going further they might find still more. There remained only that

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duty of all true and genuine archeologists — the filling in of the pit again, and the conscientious restoration of the mound to what, outwardly at least, had been its state when they had found it.

The sun had set. But there remained still more to do, and, if it was anywise possible, they wished to finish up their work that night. Who knew that Boss Hallewell would not be back by the morrow. And when Tools came down from his “go” in the “nest,” Bud did not take his place immediately. For an hour all four turned in upon the job together. Indeed, even when Bud did leave for the “grand-daddy,” he did not make his climb at once. He stopped at the camp to start the fire again. Then he made experiment to test how a brush of horsetails would answer as a frying-pan scourer. And finally he dug out a biscuit to take aloft with him.

It was a mere chance that led him, when half-way up, to lean out in the afterglow



Ninny was swimming like some great hunted sea-otter. PAGE 167

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and look down the lake. Though Bud might be the most phlegmatic of youths, what he saw left him feebly hesitating whether to go on to the top or to drop straight down to the ground again. What he did was to give their club call — the “*ka-ronk*” of a kingfisher — wave desperately to the others to get back to camp, and then pull himself pantingly onto the saddle branch as best he could.

Across the narrows which separated the eastern main shore from the islands, Ninny was swimming like some great hunted sea-otter, and not a hundred yards behind came both those spruce-camp craft. They were coming at a pace, too, the raging frenzy of which was plainly inspired by something a great deal more than the mere sight of Ninny, and Bud could feel that had he started on that swim with anything less than the lead that he had had, his chance would have been black indeed. As it was, still some ten yards ahead, he made

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the nearest island. Plunging through the underwoods that covered it, he passed the little strait dividing it from the next before the first *chaloupe* could go about and make the detour, and by the time the pursuers had reached the northern end of the second island, all sight of him was lost to them completely. They could hear him, though. There were the two boats, and as their oarsmen now caught crabs, now picked up clogging trailers of weeds, and now fouled the bank, one could see that they had that in their hearts which would have taken them after Ninny to Lake Superior, if necessary. Again, as he disappeared in the midmost center of the labyrinth, he gave them one flying glimpse, and the roar of objurgation with which they followed him, might well have blasted his every bone and sinew as he swam. But what closed like clamps upon the heart of Bud was that Ninny was taking the gang straight to that cove-like channel

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from which opened the entrance to "Port Arthur."

Yet again, by now, he had a good two minutes lead, and he had flipped himself up on the jam, dived again on the other side, and was out of sight around the crooking harbor mouth before the *chaloupe*, which was then ahead, was entering the once more quiet water.

Bud could breathe almost freely again. The *chaloupe*, with Irish Mike again commanding, and Cash-down at the steering sweep, had already passed the bottleneck, when suddenly Cash-down raised a whoop of ferocious enlightenment. He stopped the heavy craft with a double-arm, wrenching jerk that all but snapped his oar, jumped to the logs, picked up something, and held it high before the vision of the remainder of the gang.

From the top of the "grand-daddy," strain his eyes through the dark as he might, Bud could not make it out, but he was

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to hear what it was before the hour had passed. Those gestures of defiance in Ninny's martial dance of the night before which had been directed at Loggers' Inlet, had been no mere empty threats. He had stolen down to the quarters of the gang. Unhappy chance had shown him where they had *cached* their surplus store of liquor — for Irish Mike knew his men too well to let them lay hands on all of it at once. To Ninny, and with cause, those sealed and gilt-topped bottles also were the enemy, and with one large round stone he had destroyed them all. Jombateest had come upon him just when he had finished with the last of them, and added its "scalp" — or head, if you prefer — to the double handful already in his pocket.

Of the rest enough has been told already. It was one of those ragged bottle-tops that Cash-down had picked up on the jam. In the camp, Ninny, having exhibited the rest of them with a limitless triumph to

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three stupefied "Argue-nots," had now resumed his Pyrric dance of victory about the fire in doubled, nay in quadrupled ecstasy.

"Go on around," roared Irish Mike to the second *chaloupe*, which was under the charge of Jombateest, "go on around an' kape him from gittin' out the other side. For it's in there his hole is, somewheres. An' man! hadn't I an idea of it all along?"

The second *chaloupe*, in a water-threshing circuit, kept on past harbor mouth and secret passage and sally-port. The next few strokes showed her crew that they had to do not with two islands but with one. In addition to that, a hasty search of the island to the north and a glance from its craggy top, told them that Ninny had not gone on up the lake.

"He bane in dere," shouted Long Yon, pointing to the rocks about the Great Bear, and back they drove again to the first *chaloupe*.

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For the last five minutes her crew had been madly attempting to start the key-log of the jam, but it held firm, and it was out of the question to portage their heavy flat-bottom. A little more, however, and some of them would have broken through the root-ends into the harbor and followed Ninny even as he had fled.

“And little forrader it’d git ye,” wheezed their leader, “no, me bhoys, wan boat av us goes back for the pike poles. Wid thim in our hands, we’ll make our way through quick enough, an’ the other boat stays here an’ does pathrol duty. Come on, now, Bateesto, an’ I’ll draw sticks wid ye for which it is.”

The lot of going back to camp fell to the Frenchman. And as his men compelled him to take an oar with them, he received it with a new explosion of curses.

“Quick’s the word now,” exhorted Mike, “for the night’s fallin’ fast an’ the dark’ll be on us before we’ve fair got goin’.

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oh-my, but the cunnin' place he's chose," and in the half light he shoved off after Jombateest and started his craft in her first patrolling circuit of the island.

A look-out could help the Four but little now. Bud might come down, and with a leaden heart join his fellows on the ground.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE BEGINNING OF THE BATTLE

CASH-DOWN and Jombateest would have been bad citizens anywhere. The rank and file of the gang were “rough-comers,” “mixed pickles.” Despite their treatment of Ninny they were not essentially cruel, but they could be frightfully cruel—in the first place when besotted by drink; in the next, when something had brought the nether-nature brute of fury uppermost in them, and that was the case now. The same discovery that had driven all the liquor fuming from their brains had rendered them vastly more dangerous than they would have been when drunk.

As for Irish Mike, he was a man meant for better things. When he came down to Wantebec he was pointed out as one of the characters of the bush. He had won

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his leadership partly by hard fighting, partly by unruffled good humor, and partly by an endless capacity for work — for work and for devising mischief. In all probability his connection with the spruce-cutting business would terminate for all time to come before another week had passed, but that took never a whit from his entire delight in the present. In his broadly liberal idea of what constituted a good joke, “the bhoys had only been havin’ their own little fun wid Ninny,” and he intended that they “shud niver work him any actial harm.” When he considered the liquor they had had, he felt that he was controlling them in a manner worthy of high praise. But now that that liquor had been taken away, and Ninny himself was the offender, that any one whoever could control the gang, the big Irishman might very well have doubted.

Giving Satan his due, too, it was an open question whether Ninny had any right to

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break those bottles, but it was a question which the Four had little heart to argue then.

Not until now, when the thing had really come, and come with such dazing suddenness, had they had any real comprehension of what it was to mean. Not until that moment had they known how much, at the bottom of their souls, they had been counting on boss Hallewell's return, or something of the sort to intervene. Every few minutes a shout from the patrolling *chaloupe* came raucously in to them. Not until then did they really remember that they were boys and only boys. It was no matter now of frightening off a crew of young Indians with flash lights and red fire. What would they not have given for the Twenty-footer.

Yet to their credit, be it said, that their first thought was still for the poor exulting and capering worker of the mischief. They tried to get him to run for it. When that

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patrolling *chaloupe* had once more reached the north end of the island, they hurried out with him to the end of Golden Hill, and by every manner of gesture and repetition they sought to persuade him to drop into the water, get across to the lower islands, and from there make the mainland again. Considering his wonderful swimming powers, too, he could almost certainly have done it.

They did not succeed in giving him even the dimmest understanding of what his situation was. At the end of it he showed that he believed they had gone out to Golden Hill to prepare some such awful reception for those spruce men as they had given to the party from the Reservation. Again and again he caught hold of Tools or Booky by the sleeve, and with shoves and winks pointed across to Tiger's Tail—that was where they had been before. Why weren't they starting for their waiting-place again.

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“It’s no use,” said Jack, “we might as well make up our minds to it. He thinks now that he’s safe with us if the whole North Woods were after him, and they’ll be back on us inside an hour. We’d better get him up into the keep.”

The keep, that little rock-head barbican which overlooked camp and beach together, has been roughly described already, but perhaps it may make for clearness to describe it again. In front, it rose, broken by a single sill or ledge, perhaps a dozen feet above the jumbled rocks about its foot. Its top was nest-like and naturally ramparted, though open and falling away behind, and this open rear the Four had covered by their barricade, a low wall of stone and stumps. Moreover, the keep was part of a kind of island of rock, separated from the mainland of Port Arthur by that wide, irregular fissure which Booky had named the moat. You could get into the moat from the clump of cedars just

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behind the tent, but so thickly, both above and below, was its granite channel filled and overhung with berry and hazel bushes and young evergreens, that even where it was a good twenty feet in width, you could probably have found it from below only by chance, and from above by falling into it.

Half feeling their way, they climbed the ridge leading to the center of the island. They made the turn-back, got Ninny across the moat by the three small logs which formed their drawbridge, pulled the drawbridge after them, and got over their barricade.

What need to say, though, that those spruce gangers, once they had learned the way — and the keep could be scaled from its very front — would get into it almost as easily as they had themselves. For a moment, too, they had thought of taking up the Twenty-two with them, but the spruce men had a gun of their own — very

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likely they had it with them — and one bad move might lead to worse. Yet, take the keep as it was, it was the one place on the island where they could put Ninny behind them, and do what they could to protect him according to the pledge they had given. And they intended to protect him as long as they could stand up and take punishment.

Ninny himself had again dropped down to the beach and the campfire. When he saw that there was still no hurry about getting out to Tiger's Tail and Golden Hill, he once more, with infinite pride, produced those bottle-top trophies of his, and, looping an old piece of fishing line to a dead branch, he began to knot them into a species of triumphal garland. But the boys let him alone. The moment would come only too quickly when he would flee to join them.

It had come already. The second *chalo* had made the return trip with a jack-

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light in her bows. She had sped through the labyrinth as if in daylight. The glare from the flaming pine fat came up to the jam. Irish Mike's men were waiting for them upon it. They caught the pike poles as fast as they could be flung to them, raised an answering yell, and got to work, and with the first real levering weight, the logs seemed to go of themselves.

"Ninny!" called Tools, in a half voice, "Ninny!"

"He'll come all right," said Jack, "or if he doesn't we'll go down to him."

The first *chaloupe* began to shoulder its way through the harbor mouth.

For a moment Ninny sat listening, nailed in his place. Then and only then did he understand. With a leaping spasm of terror he rushed to the rear of the keep, then came to a halt in a misery of indecision, then flung himself back and into the tent, as if in search of something. Oh, he would join himself to the boys soon

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enough now. They could keep their eyes for those fast-arriving spruce men.

They saw the first *chaloupe* bump among the rocks of the shore just as they heard Ninny pull himself over the barricade behind them. He seemed to have a faggot-like bundle in his arms, and it rattled with his fear.

The second *chaloupe* thrust itself in alongside the first, but until the first was empty, the way to land was blocked. Jombateest kicked his execrated oar away from him. Bending down, he came up with a thick, murderous-looking black-snake whip.

At the sight of it — and it came from the memory of something that no one had yet heard about in Wantebec — there broke from Ninny one long, wild, and desperate cry — the cry almost of an animal, but a cry to stop the heart.

“Gosh, Jack,” said Booky, “what’ll we do? What’ll we do?”

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Jombateest balanced himself on the edge of the first *chaloupe* to make the jump to shore, and “*V’là!*” he cried, “dat’s de dev’. Breeng ’im down, *mes garçons*, breeng ’im down.”

Ninny’s cry had been almost that of an animal, but what animal, however timid, however naturally harmless, will not fight back when brought to bay, in the very madness of its terror. There was a sudden, snapping *whang-g* — a *z-zz* as of a great bee, and something seemed to burn by Booky’s cheek. It was an arrow from Ninny’s bow. The blunt, ashen shaft went with a most deadly precision too. It caught the fat Jombateest upon his puffy, unshaven jaw, and catching him so as he still balanced between boat and shore, pitched him into four feet of water.

There was one general yell.

“*Yi!*”

“*Petit bleu!*”

“*Nom d’une pipe — !*”

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“An’ right it sarved him,” roared Irish Mike. “I tould ye plain to have no more of that blacksnake work, wid me in command. Gobs, an’ that was shootin’ too. Whee! Ninny, bow and all. I can see plain we’re goin’ to have some fun for our money.”

Gulping and spitting water, Jombateest clambered to shore; his whip remained somewhere at the bottom. With a circling sweep the gang took possession of the empty camp, and in the keep Ninny was tremulously thrusting and pushing their own bows into the hands of those four “Argue-nots.” For their bows and arrows it had been that had made the bulk of that faggot-like bundle he had brought with him from the tent. It was his answer to the question of what they were to do.

The idea was wild, fantastic, absurd, one that could have come only from Ninny himself. Yet what help would they be to him, if they could only

BEGINNING OF BATTLE

use their hands, or stand up there and threaten, and Jack began to shove arrows up under his sweater without arguing the thing further.

“Oh, I know it’s crazy,” he said. “But anyway, it’s something, and we’ll be able to feel that we did everything we could.”

“All right,” said Bud. “Me, too. Chuck me my bunch, and we’d better leave the bulk of them here where it’s flat.”

“If they’re going to get him — if they’re going to get him, then they’re going to fight for it.” Tools and Booky were hysterically clasping hands in the darkness.

In another half minute, kneeling behind that natural rampart of the keep — as if it had been a medieval fortress in very truth, and manned by the archers of the guard — there was not one bowman alone but five.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE BATTLE CONTINUED

CASH-DOWN kicked a log into the fire. "Come on, boys," he barked. "We'll find the kid bunch later on. Come on, and get Ninny down out o' that."

Jack stood up, and amid another yell let himself be seen. "We give you notice now to keep out and let him alone."

"What?" ejaculated Irish Mike, "so ye're all in the same nist, too. An', sonnies, I know ye're game young birds, an' reasonable. I know that when ye hear the mortal wrong he's done to us the day —"

"Ah, cut it out," again broke in Cash-down; "they know mighty beggarin' well the dirt he's done us."

"Yes," said Jack, "and if it'll be any use, we're willing to turn in all the coin

BATTLE CONTINUED

we've got along with us to pay for it. But you know mighty well it was what you did to him down there with your water cure that made him think of it."

"That's all right now, and it ain't that kind o' pay we've come for. Nor we didn't come to put up no arguments, neither."

"We know you didn't."

"But jest this, though" — and into Cash-down's voice there came something that was more evil even than his fury — "maybe if you kids are willin' to act wise an' keep a shut face about any doin's there's maybe goin' to be with Ninny up here to-night —"

The suggestion was all that was needed to put the final nerve into their bow-arms. "Yes, we're likely to. We're *likely*."

"If we'd been that sort we wouldn't be up here at all."

"And we give you notice again —"

They did not hear. One of the gang

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had just happened upon Ninny's garland of bottle-heads, and he held it up with a kind of yelp. "Boys," he said, "can youse stand for that."

"*Sacre bleu!*"

"*Tabernac!*"

"Larry Gilligan! We'll make him eat them."

Waiting for neither word nor leader, they charged across the broken, firelit stretch between camp and keep and made for the point in the rugged, upstanding scarp which, even at a distance, showed itself to be scaleable. And, let it be said again, it was scaleable, as long as you could take your time and were not troubled too much while you were doing the scaling.

His own long eldrich screech giving back that on-coming yell, Ninny began to shoot at once, and he drew to the full stretch of thong and hickory. Long Yon got it, and Cash-down, and a little fellow called Montreal Jack.

BATTLE CONTINUED

But the others — with them it was good enough logic that if Ninny marked two or three of them he could not mark them all; and, heads down, arms up as shields, and shouting battle, murder, and sudden death, they came on in a rush. It was then, indeed, that they learned for the first time that they had those five bows to reckon with.

It was all but impossible to miss. The defenders leaned far over their rampart. They shot as rapidly as they could draw shaft to head, and their arrows went home with the thud, thud, thud of big hailstones. Arms and backs, heads and shoulders all seemed to get it at once and without mercy. The moral effect alone was enough to bring about the first astounded back-surge for cover. Those who had not stopped to use their eyes at all would have been ready to swear that they had to do with fifty or a hundred.

But some of their fellows at least could

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reassure them, and now, with a war-cry that made their first seem like a mere song of love, they rushed forward a second time.

Again the range became point blank. It was almost too cruelly close. Those hob-nosed shafts could do no vital injury, but they could raise humps like walnuts and pigeons' eggs. Yet the battle was none of the boys' choosing. With Ninny's every cry of hope and fear as he sent his arrows home, they were reminded anew of what they were fighting for. And it was do or die.

The spruce men were now over the first tumble of rocks and were crowding together at the base of the keep. Palpably it would have been much better for them had they been only half as many. But they had burningly resolved to finish with it this time at any rate, and those behind thrust and heaved and hoisted up those before.

“Up with youse, now.”

“Sock it to her.”

BATTLE CONTINUED

“*Montez! Montez toujours!*” (Up! Keep on up!)

“We’ll have ’em in a minute.”

And then, as they, too, got it, “Wow! Ah, b’gare! Suffering snakes! *Nom d’une pipe!*”

“But keep on goin’,” shouted those behind, and somehow or other they did keep on.

The five defenders had only one thought — to plant every shaft where it would do the most good, and to attack and defense alike it was achingly apparent that every second was bringing the moment nearer that was to decide that first battle, in any case. And now that moment of moments had arrived.

A big fellow, the “spike” of the howling phalanx, a French Canadian whose head seemed to be an iron pot and his arms old beech-roots, had got a grip on that sill-like ledge that bit into the keep not four feet below the parapet, and the struggle

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would be over when that ledge was taken. It was dead ground, too, that is, it was so far within the defenders' guard that they could not bring their bows to bear on it.

"Once more, now," yelled the gang. "Once more an' we — Yah! Cripes! *Misère!* Up youse go, though. Up youse go, Napoleon."

And doubtless Napoleon believed his Alps already crossed, but at that moment Jack dropped his weapon, seized one of Ninny's longest and heaviest-headed arrows, and leaning far out whacked the big Canajun again and again upon his brawny knuckles. He let go with an irruption of *patois* such as it was well few but his own people could understand. From very torture his feet kicked out as if they belonged to some gigantic jumping-jack. He came down like a dumped horse and cart on those below him, and they in their turn brought down the rest.

The panic that took the assailants then,

BATTLE CONTINUED

half of whom had landed on their backs, was that instinctive terror we have of being hit upon the face. Getting to their feet in any way at all, they fell over each other in one insensate rush for cover to leeward of the tent.

Irish Mike, well ahead, received his sprawling and broken following with shouts of hilarious congratulation.

“There now! There now, me lads!” he cried. “Ye’re great fighters — there’s nobody to deny it—even if ye did come away just when ye had them bate!”

Cash-down, shaking a bunch of fingers as if he desired only to get rid of them, swung about and all but sprang on him. “Gah-h! It’s dead easy for you to talk!”

“It is not! I have to re-adjoost me lower jaw after ivery worrd av two syllables!”

He turned to some infuriate warriors who were groping about in the grass and bushes, “An’ ye nade hope to do nawthin’

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ag'in them wid rocks, nayther! For, as I saw early, there are no rocks!" (In fact, all that had been available had long ago gone into the barricade.)

But half the Frenchmen, led by Napoleon, appeared to be hesitating only between another attack and internecine war; and the latter seemed considerably the more attractive. It was a time when diplomacy was needed.. And at once the big Irishman became the diplomat.

"Bhoys," he said, "I apologize. It was all my fault. I shud 'a' been leadin' ye. But ye were too brave an' 'ager at it! The wan chanst ye give me to show the way was when ye started back!"

"Maybe," said Jombateest, grinning like a wolf, "maybe you got soam plan of your own fer do it — no?"

"Tutt, tutt, tutt, tutt! I'm sorry fer ye. An' I'm sorry fer mesilf! But what annybody could av tould us shud have been done by siege, or at laste by flankin'

BATTLE CONTINUED

tactics, we tried to do by pure bull-headedness! Not only that. Here's a chanst put in our hands for a whole night's enj'yment an' we'd be fer squanderin' it all in five minutes fer a little cheap glory!"

"*Hein? Hein?*"

"Ah, what you gettin' at?"

"Listen. Have we fed the night? Deuce a snack, even! An' no doubt a-plinty right here under our noses only fer liftin' the tent flap. Sure! Frish bass, an' half a side of bacon, an' tay, an' biscuits! Bring it all around here, now, an' we'll build a second fire, well out o' range. We'll eat and eat well, after which I'll show ye how a castel *shud* be took! Oh, I warrant ye'll not be disappointed, an' if ye fear they'll jump their bail betwane whiles, some of ye go up there on the rocks behind and do sentinel; go! You, Napoleong, you'll niver drink tay, I can see, till ye've drunk revinge; that'll be a houldin' job fer you!"

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Napoleon did go up. It was by the barest margin, indeed, that he missed the moat. And, plainly, the great majority of the gang had almost as little mind for eating then as had Napoleon. That rock-head once taken, there would be a different story to tell. But, for the present, the big leader's queer grip on them held firm. The power was still with good nature and the Irish.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE MOAT

FROM the keep the boys could follow the flaring glow of that second fire. And it was only a matter of minutes until, of their whole store of provisions, which once had seemed so ample, there was left to them only a little flour and salt, and a single tin of biscuits, overlooked because they had been shoved under Booky's sleeping-bag.

But it was not of that they thought. It was of the matter of ammunition. Their stock of arrows had an hour before seemed as inexhaustible as their provisions. Now they had scarcely a dozen left among them. No longer did they lack confidence in those Robin Hood weapons. They had proven their value once, and they felt that they would again. But what value is the

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best bow in the world with an empty quiver? Of more service to them after all would have been the poor old Twenty-two itself hanging plugged, with its cartridge belt, from the back tent-pole! One chance only remained to them. And Bud and Booky alone had thought of that. But they were to be given little more time even for racking anticipations.

Irish Mike took a last gulp of tea, threw the tin cup over his shoulder, and brought his big hands down with a smack upon the knees of the men on either side of him.

“Now!” he said, “Come on wid ye! Up the hill to Napoleong! There we’ll be on the same level wid them. But don’t be too hasty, naythor. Circle it wide so ye don’t come inty range till we’re all of us ready to make our charge thegither!”

The firelight had been in the eyes of the diners for the last hour. Consequently, for the first minutes in the darkness, they were now almost blind. Nor was that

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main ridge of "Port Arthur" a climb that could be taken on the run at any time. To say the least, the gang had little attention to give to anything that might be taking place behind them. And, in the keep, Booky and Bud fell across each other, as at the same instant they flung themselves to climb the rampart. Flamingly in the heart of both was the same fierce intention.

"No! Let me! I'm going!"

"No! You're a better shot than I am, and if they get me, you'll be more use up here."

In another moment Booky was over and upon that sill-like ledge; and before the others understood, in a sliding drop he had reached the rocks below.

There was no lack of arrows there. Three-quarters of what they had shot away lay within a radius of ten yards, and with both out-sweeping hands Booky — once the timid, the indoors-keeping — gathered them in!

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The others hardly allowed themselves to breathe. "Goo' boy! Goo' boy! Goo' boy! Now we'll have some show again!"

There was a yell from the last of the spruce gang. Their rear guard started on a backward rush. But Booky continued to throw those all-precious "blunt-heads" back into the keep in sheaves. Not till Long Yon had rounded the tent behind him did he clutch the ends of the bows which Bud and Jack had let far down and pull himself back into safety. "It's all right, fellows," he said. "And I guess, Ninny, they're not going to get you for a little while yet!"

Irish Mike had beheld the maneuver with admiration undisguised. "Well, now, Old Nickie take them!" he exclaimed. "An', lads, between fightin' pluck an' cliverness, ye'll not deny they're goin' far towards earnin' a free pardon."

That was as might be. It was darkly significant that the suggestion seemed to



Back into safety. PAGE 200

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go entirely unsupported. Under the dim and redly rising moon the gang gathered themselves together among the hazels for their rush.

“Now, bhoys, as ye can see, the young cocks have built some species av brist-work. But it’s not more than vaultin’ high. Ye can go over it leppin’, an’ one hand free. They’ll sure wing some av us. But the faster we’re travelin’ the fewer ’twill be. Sprid out now! Are ye all riddy? Thin up an’ on!”

With a whoop that was both of vengeance and victory — for already they saw themselves inside the wall — they dropped their heads and launched themselves.

Those who have read Victor Hugo’s description of the battle of Waterloo will remember that, according to the famous novelist, it was the trench of Mont St. Jean, lying all unsuspected across the front of the French cavalry, that led to a great army’s undoing. And now, in the case

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of that spruce gang, such a trench — though it was of old nature's making — was to prove the moat. From end to end those clustering bushes masked it with the deadly effectiveness of the most finished military art.

“Yeow! Larry Gilli — *Misère!*”

Barely had the gang developed a full charging pace than those in front suddenly found themselves treading on nothing at all! And next moment they were landing six feet down in the tangle of old berry canes on the bottom.

“Ah, bagosh! Murderin' Isaacs! Ho, I'm keel'd!”

And then the voice of affliction was plainly that of Irish Mike himself. “Gobs, will a few more av ye jump on me! There's still a part av me back untaken!”

Such of the gang as had been able to stop in time ran deliriously up and down the edge of the moat looking for a place where it could be leaped. And, had they

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kept on far enough to the left, they would have found it. But the densely growing hazels and young spruces hid that, as they had the moat itself. The blinking moon seemed only to reveal on every hand still more horrid chasms. And once more Ninny had remorselessly begun to shoot.

Those now painfully finding their feet at the bottom of the moat were, from their position at least, well under cover. But after the manner of furious men they showed no wise intention of profiting thereby. Once on their feet, their hands told them that the inner face of the rock could be climbed in half a dozen places. Maligning all such as stayed behind and above for cowards and slinkers, they rushed blindly to the escalade. In their turn the men above began to drop down, cankered now from new wounds of body and spirit both. From the whole central stretch of the moat went up their yell and

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slogan; and again the assault was under full and raging headway.

But, once more, the range was point-blank. This time, too, if the assailants were to win the level, they must present their unkempt mops all unprotected to the slaughter, and, no sooner had head after head shoved into view, than it was as if the whole inner brink of the moat turned itself into one continuous black hornet's nest.

In the keep the Four felt themselves become mere automatons, with a single purpose — to get their arrows to the bow-notch faster, and faster, and faster, and yet make every arrow tell. Their eyes were fixed; their throats were dry. The very intensity of the excitement had become a kind of strange absence of it. Ninny himself was strangely silent now. His dog-like eyes still kept their wordless dependence on the boys—wordless dependence and a gratitude that was wholly measureless. But there was more than

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that. One would have said that something had *changed* in him.

So far the attackers, with all capacity for thought jarred out of them by the moat, were simply repeating their first mistake of not acting together. As soon as they should get it into their heads that half of them must simultaneously devote their fevered energies to pitching the other half up and out, then—two leaps for the barricade and everything would be over. As it was, they were all of them suffering in turn for no good. It was the boldest, too, who suffered most. Those who put only a hand into that black hornet's nest, and then dropped back to hug it to them or, like Cash-down, try to shake it off, could take it out in language. But when Napoleon and Long Yon and Irish Mike himself succeeded in getting themselves fairly to their knees upon the edge, for endless moment after endless moment endured the red-hot rush and punishment

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of those living stings, yet at the end had to give up and fall back again—what shall be said for them? Man after man roaringly turned himself into a target for five seconds, for eight, for ten! But no mortal spruce ganger could endure it for fifteen! It remained to be seen how much longer it would be till they learned from their sufferings. But at the most it could now be only a matter of minutes.

Meanwhile some of those bruised and baffled bulls of Bashan were smashing their way along the moat to find its outlet. It was in this way, in fact, that they discovered that its campward end opened in the cedars hard by the tent. But what profit was that to them? They could only charge impotently back again. It could not help them. But it was to be the means of bringing the attack to the most calamitous and unlooked-for of *dénouements*.

There is perhaps but one thing that

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hurts more than being hit with an arrow on the ear. That is being hit on the same ear with a second arrow. And a moment before he broke his way out into camp and tent, this had been the fortune of Jombateest. With a yell of fury he ran to the tent and came back with the Twenty-two and the belt of shells. And, spitting *patois*, he thrust in a cartridge as he came.

“Ye will not,” cried Irish Mike. “Ye will not! Clinch him boys, an’ git him down!”

But, leveling it straight at the figures in the keep, Jombateest foamingly pulled the trigger.

When a charge of powder cannot go forward, it is going to go back, and if there is anything movable in its way, that is going to go along with it. In the present case part of the mechanism of the breach was movable. And together shell, bullet, and breach-block blew straight back across Jombateest’s greasy cheek. The gun

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dropped clinking on the rocks, both his hands went to his head, and, "*Aie, mon dieu*, I am daid!" he cried; "I am daid!"

Irish Mike pulled him around and made a swift and ruthless examination.

"Ah-h, no such desert! 'Tis only your ear ag'in. An' ye've still got a good part av it left!"

But what followed showed clearly the weakness of divided commands. Fully persuaded that if he was not already dead only salve and bandages could keep him from bleeding to death, Jombateest rushed for the *chaloupes*. And in a minute every "Canajun" was backing him. Jombateest leaped into one of the boats. Long Yon and Cash-down, seeing in a moment that the number of those Frenchmen must compel the whole party to go or stay together, seized the craft by the bows. Jombateest tore an oar loose and swung it high. And his fellows flew to jerk out others.

The situation called for instant decision

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and generalship. And, on the instant, Irish Mike projected himself forward and into it.

“Now, now, now, now! If ye’re goin’ to take it like that!” The choice was between a temporary retreat and mutual destruction, and he chose at once. “Bhoys,” he entreated, “it comes suddin’, an’ it comes heart-breakin’, but I see the way it is.”

Bellows of bloodthirsty refusal stopped him.

“I tell ye there’s nawthin’ ilse for it! I’m not wantin’ to go no more nor you are. An’ we’ll come back ag’in! Oh, be sure we will! Come on, now, come on!”

“An’ leave them to pike it in the meantime?”

“Now will they pike it? Ye can note yersilves their boat is gone, an’ it’s a true tale Xavier was tellin’ about seein’ the young Injins wid it! We take no chances whativer when we lave thim be a few hours

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more. Sure an' it'll be nigh the mornin' when we git back home, the way it is! Come on now, come on! Will ye have Jombateest a corp on our hands? Have some fellow-feelin', now!"

It was something that arguing could not do at once. But in the end it did it. From the keep the defenders saw the incredible accomplished. Half pulling, half pushing them, Irish Mike got even the most rabid of his company on board at last. And carrying all their bruises with them, once more they headed out for the shanties!

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

AGAIN AT BAY

WE'VE got to run for it!" said Jack. "If they'd only stopped to think, they could have bridged the moat, or cut bushes for head shields, or — oh, there's twenty things they could have done!"

"That's right! And you can be most mighty sure they'll be thinking of them now!"

They had believed that they would never be able to sleep at all, and a half hour after the spruce gang had departed dawn had begun to break. But, once more, from pure body weariness, they had slept almost until noon. They had, however, awakened to no self-delusions. Blind chance had given them the victory for the present hour, but

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there could be no faintest doubt of the way it would go in a final issue.

“We’ve got to run for it,” said Jack again. “It’s hard lines after standing them off twice over. But we know what’s saving up for us if we stay. We’ll make some sort of raft, and cross over to the main shore and hit the old voyageur trail for the Reservation Village.”

Granted, that might land them in the hands of the Reservation enemy. But anything would be safer now than waiting there on the island. They would *caché* the things from the Great Bear, and they would get back for them some time or other! They would take with them only what they absolutely had to take. If they pushed straight inland from that western shore, they would strike the trail somewhere. Even if only one of them made it, he could appeal to Chief Johnny White Horse or some other old head man in the village, and he would see them through. They

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had money enough to buy a few supplies. They would enter the hottest kind of complaint about the theft of the Twenty-footer. And then they would hit the trail again and tramp the hundred miles back to Wantebec!

Ninny had, for the moment, disappeared again. But after his last experience no one could fear that he had gone far this time. Hurrying through a breakfast-lunch of pilot biscuit they set to with all speed to make their raft.

There were almost no small logs that could be of service. And the big ones could not be used in the shape they were. They had to chop them into lengths with their one small hand-axe and then lower them down to the water. Then, too, if they were going to take their sleeping-bags, the raft must be given some kind of floor. And this called for a lot more of the hardest splitting and wedging work. Even with that, their labor would have gone for naught

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had they not been able once more to draw upon old Job's inestimable "six-inchers."

They felt reasonably safe in calculating that the spruce gang would sleep at least as long as they had. Nor was it likely that they would feel like rushing to their *chaloupes* immediately, even when they did wake up again. But, from three o'clock on, a watch was maintained in the crow's-nest uninterruptedly.

A half hour of flying axe and jack-knife manipulation gave them five primitive but serviceable paddles — five — but Ninny was still to come back to claim his own.

"Oh, that's all right, now," said Bud, letting himself down for the last time from the mighty pine; "you'll see he'll be back now any time. For one thing he hasn't had anything to eat to-day."

"Sure," said Jack; "he'll be back by the time we really need him. And we've got to get our Great Bear stuff safely planted yet."



They cached those priceless mound relics in that jungle of cedars. PAGE 215

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They *cached* those priceless mound relics in that jungle of cedars by the secret passage, and covered them with such a top-dressing of leaves and cedar droppings as they could feel would have baffled a Sherlock Holmes. Then, saying good-by to the tent—for it was out of the question to pack it on their backs for the ten days “hike” that was ahead of them—they swiftly sorted over their stuff, rolled what they were going to take into their sleeping-bags, and loaded up. It was after four, and late enough. They were ready now. But Ninny had still to show himself.

And only then, when the race and tension of preparing for their flight was over, did they realize what the strain would be to stand there for even two minutes longer and wait for him. For now seconds were worth minutes, and minutes hours!

Yet there remained another thing that they could do, and feel that they were saving time. They could get the raft

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around to the sally port, from which there was an almost straightaway course to the western shore. That would be a few minutes made good use of anyway.

They took the raft around, anchored her under the port, pulled themselves up the bank, and once more went back to camp. He couldn't stay away much longer, now! He couldn't! He simply couldn't be crazy enough! But — still there was no Ninny!

Five o'clock came, and six. Waiting had now become a torture. The sun slowly lost itself below the horizon of the islands and again there was only the afterglow. Another hour, and even if they did make the mainland that night, it would be too dark to steer their way through the bush and find the trail. Yet to stay where they were —! And *still* no Ninny!

At first they did not wholly grasp the decision that they had to come to. There could be little doubt now that the spruce gang were for their part only waiting for

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the darkness again. Nor would they have long to wait; a bank of heavy cloud was rising from the fallen sun. Bud had mounted to the crow's-nest. With every rustling leaf their hearts leaped up with the thought that the stray-away had at last been sighted—or fell unhopingly to catch their knell of warning. And did they but know it, in that hour they had entered upon the real test of their expedition—one of those tests which forever after give character a new standard to brace to conqueringly, or leave it with a sense of instamped meanness which, as long as memory lasts, can never be escaped from.

As always, too, all the arguments were on the other side: Hadn't they done everything in mortal power towards taking care of Ninny, as it was? Hadn't it been up to him at least to stay around? And how could you explain his keeping away like this for so long now, if this time he hadn't

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gone for good? Ten to one, if they stayed there and were half murdered, Ninny'd never so much as hear of it!

Bud called, swung out and down from the "grand-daddy," wig-wagging as he came.

"Is it him? Is it him?"

"No," he answered, like tragedy. "It's the *chaloupes*, both of them."

Yet even now they could probably make the mainland safely.

"Oh, say!" said Booky, "this is fierce!"

"It's the limit, all right!" said Tools.

"Fellows," said Jack — and his voice was a little husky — "I know we all feel just the same about it. But supposing we heard afterwards that he'd come back here just a few minutes after we'd gone and walked right into the gang, and they — they —"

"That's right."

"And it seemed to me somehow, last night, that if they'd caught one of us, and

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it'd been up to him to go through just anything at all to rescue us, that he'd just have given his life so quick —!"

"I — I guess that's what."

"I sort of — sort of felt that way about him, too."

"That's right! And, gosh, we won't go, neither — not for anything on earth!"

"Oh, I've no doubt he's up to some poor silly-fool nonsense again. But we can't let that make any diff. We've got to stand by him. That's what we're here for."

"And we've got our bows and arrows yet."

"It's going to be a lot darker, too, to-night."

"Tools," said Jack, "you go up there again, and keep on the look-out till the last possible second. Even if he only turns up in time for us to shove the raft off from up at the port there, while they're coming in down here, it's black enough to maybe dodge them, even then!"

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“And if they do get here ahead of him —”

“Then he’ll just find us, dead or alive, waiting in the keep for him again!”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE TWENTY-FOOTER

IT would have been so much easier if they could only have been doing something in the meantime. But now there seemed to be nothing that they could do. Yet “they also serve who only stand and wait;” and they got their fire going again, and stood under the “grand-daddy,” and waited. They might not be able to see Tools up there. But the night was so still that, as he lay flattened out on the “saddle-branch,” everything came down to them with the eerie distinctness of a stage whisper.

“They’re making time, all right. And they seem to be steering away from each other. . . . No, no, they’re not. They’re back again now right side by side.”

Then there was a longer silence.

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“Are they together yet?”

“Yes, and they — But, *say! Say!*” —
And now there was a new note, a note of the startled, of the dumbfounded, in the voice of Tools, “there’s something else moving, — from the west shore!”

“It isn’t Ninny?”

“No — oh, no, it isn’t him! And, there’s three or four! — *Fellows!*” He made as if to come down the tree, then stayed where he was, half choking. “It’s — it’s those beggars from the Reservation, again! And they’re making north, — to drop on us from up above!”

It was plain, then, that the Chippewa mind had had time to have some second thoughts on the subject of red fire and bear-heads!

Tools sat there as if transfixed. “And I can see another now. It’s cutting straight across among the islands further down.”

As has been said, one could make one’s way into Port Arthur by way of the sally-

THE TWENTY-FOOTER

port. Had not the Four just accomplished it themselves? But it was practically a matter of hauling one's self up, hand and foot, over the spikes of a stump fence, — something which the spruce men never had any thought of doing.

But to those young Indians it would be a feat of little difficulty. Also, they must have got to know the port quite well when they were making away with the Twenty-footer. To crown it all, — and the thought was a sickening one, — they would now have the advantage of the use of the raft.

“Tools,” Jack called quietly, “Toolsy, old man, you might as well come down now. We'll have to get back there first, and get our packs up. We can stow them somewhere. And then there's nothing else for us to do but to trust to our bows again.”

They groped their way as best they could along the shelving rim of the bowl and made the port. Tools and Jack lowered themselves to the raft. And the two above took

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the packs as they lifted them. It did not seem to matter a great deal where they put them. They had no time really to hide them. But there was that heavy growth of cedars extending on both sides of the secret passage. And they shoved them under them, not far from where they had *cached* the things from the Great Bear.

And they had begun once more to feel their way back to the keep, when, from the twistings of the labyrinth on the west, they caught a sound. Unbreathingly they stood to listen.

It was not a sound of paddles: the Reservationers could muffle them well enough! It was a dry, harsh rip-p, rip-p. It came at regular intervals, and it could come only from rushes going down before a swiftly thrusting cut-water. In the night it is a sound which carries weirdly far.

“It’s — it’s that one that was coming straight over,” said Tools. He could hardly speak.

THE TWENTY-FOOTER

“And it’s — it’s making right for the passage!”

“You’d say they’d been watching us plant our things there from the beginning!”

“All right!” said Jack, “then I know what I’m going to do, — and there’s time for it, too, before the others catch us. If the sneaking beasts know about the passage, they know they’ve got to use a rope or something to get them up to the grape-vines. I’m going to be waiting there. And I’m going to give them the sort of welcome they’re richly suffering for!”

“Me, too!” said Tools. “If they’ve been watching us as close as that, they’ll find they’ve just been sharp enough to give themselves the edge.”

Jack turned to reassure the other two. “Oh, we won’t stay a jiffy longer than is safe.”

Bud and Booky stood a moment. Then they, too, fiercely hardened to it. Grasping their bows, they started for the keep.

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Jack, on hands and knees, was already out of sight behind the screen of fox-grapes. And he hooked himself along a twisting, ropy stem as thick almost as his arm, till he was hanging above the water. Tools followed and got in as close beside him as he could, and yet leave room enough to use his weapon. Again came that dry rip-p, rip-p.

Because Tools knew that this party, at any rate, must have seen the *chaloupes*, he was almost ready to believe that both forces were working in unison. And what he had no doubt of whatsoever was that both these divisions from the Reservation shore had timed their movements and made all plans for a simultaneous surprise. "Well, we've made a few of our own!" he said intensely.

Again that brushing rip-p, *rip-p*! It came now from the last rush bed, — one which flanked the channel directly across from the passage. Yet now, too, the boys had

THE TWENTY-FOOTER

begun to get the accompanying sound; and it did not seem to be the nervous double-quick of paddles at all! And then, from the midst of it, came the *ka-ronk! ka-ronk!* of a kingfisher, — alike an imitation and a call.

It was Ninny!

And in ten seconds more their eyes were telling them the rest: It was Ninny with the Twenty-footer!

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

OUT OF THE LABYRINTH

JACK thrust down a big grape-vine branch. And Ninny whipped the painter about it.

Tools waited only to get breath. Then, stumbling and tripping in his haste, he fled back through the pitchy central darkness of the island for the keep. He could hear the *chaloupes* entering the bottle-neck as he ran!

“Fellows! Fellows! Come it! Come it, quick! I’ll tell you on the way.” Again he could not get the words. “It’s the Twenty-footer! And Ninny, too!”

Nor was there need of his saying more. Booky and Bud came over the barricade and dropped down to soft-bottom in the moat like cats. But, as they took the camp-fire at a leap, they were seen from the first *chaloupe*.

OUT OF THE LABYRINTH

“*V'là!*”

“Cripes!”

“No doubt they got a place to lay for us now somewheres in behind!”

But the bushy blackness of the under-woods had again engulfed the boys, and a minute more and they had reached the passage.

Jack, in a tremor of haste, was just lowering Ninny the last of the packs. “Don’t you see? Jinks, don’t you see?” he exulted, answering their question before they could ask it. “They’ll all be away from the shanties now. And once we get clear without their seeing us, we can make our portage there as safe as — as — Booky, that Great Bear stuff — where was it you planted it? We’re going to get away with every mortal thing except the tent, and be twenty miles down river by morning.”

And then the two newcomers had to take hold of themselves again.

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“Gosh! But do you think we’ve got the time for it?”

“They’re under here — no, here — further up!”

In Booky’s throat was an up-welling, unutterable delight. He flung the topping of leaves aside, and the earth disappeared beneath his hands. “And on that side, too, Buddy. They’re all together, you know, and the little things inside the pots. Here’s the big, skull one! You’ll have to help me out with it.”

Tools swiftly got himself down into the boat to pack away. As fast as they could be handed to him, each earthy treasure was safely cushioned in a nest of its own among the blankets. And Booky silently kept tab.

“*What’s that? What’s that?*”

It was a light bumping sound from the sally-port.

“It’s the canoes, all hunky, this time! Will we put for it?”

OUT OF THE LABYRINTH

But there were still two of the pots to find.

“And we’re all right here, too,” said Jack. “We’re going to see the job through now.”

“That’s what!”

But it seemed as if they were never to find those last two pots. They would have abandoned the search in the end, only that their visitors, too, appeared to be giving themselves all the time there was. . . . Or, had it really been those Reservationers that they had heard at the sally-port? If it had been, then one might have believed they had stopped on the raft to complete their plans by the lengthiest of pow-wows in sign language.

Yet the spruce gangers, — they were no less quiet! They had seen the boys, too, and learned that they were no longer in the keep. And granting that they also might have preparations of their own to make, they were not young Indians. How could

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they maintain that absolute, that now almost unearthly silence? — But was that silence? Was it?

If it was, — if it was, then it was the kind of silence that you can hear *creeping*! And at the same moment four “Argue-nots” felt themselves grow rigid. From the sally-port end of the bowl a pebble had rattled down, — then another. And they were followed, an instant later, by the crackling snap of a dead raspberry-cane on the road from camp!

Briefly, and not to dwell upon the agony, what was taking place was this: Far from acting together, — which on the very face of it had been improbable enough, — both spruce gangers and Reservationers were acting in the most complete ignorance of each others’ movements. But chance — betrayer of men! — had brought them there on the same night, and put into their equally nefarious hearts practically the same idea. For, while those Reserva-

OUT OF THE LABYRINTH

tioners were coming with all stealth to surprise the camp from the direction of the sally-port, those spruce men had spread themselves out, and with the same serpent-like stealth were seeking to locate that new ambush "in behind." And it was a moral certainty that some of those creeping skirmishers would inevitably meet.

Inevitably? They were meeting now!

"Wah!"

"Yi!" Immediately like cause and effect, there followed the sound of a blow; a blow, too, as immediately returned.

"Gobs! Hit *me!* — me that would 'a' pretected ye!" Once more it was the voice of Irish Mike. "Then that fer ye, too — an' that! Ta-ra-ra, come on, bhoys! We got thim now!"

That first collision had apparently taken place on the very rim of the bowl. For in another moment both combatants could be heard to slip, and then roll, kicking and hammering, to the bottom!

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Nothing more was called for. Wasting no breath on war-cries, both forces rose to their feet in the darkness, and rushed headlong for the encounter.

Some of them joined the first two in the bowl before they could strike a blow. But no matter for that. All alike had set their teeth with the selfsame vow, to finish with it in a single onslaught!

“Ugh!” And a blow.

“Wow!” And another blow.

“*Blan!* Ay bane Swedish man!”

“*Poignez, mes enfants, poignez!*” (Give it to them, boys, give it to them!)

“An’ down you go, too! Bite, would youse — an’ gouge?”

“La-ga-dig-a —”

“Wah-h! Wah-h!”

“Scutt!! It sounds like they’d got help from the Reservation.”

“Then it’s goin’ to be bad for the Reservation. We’ll trim the whole boilin’ of them together.”

OUT OF THE LABYRINTH

“Chippewa boy heap friend!”

“Yiss! Me eye feels like it! I’m a hape frind, too, — an’ the top av the hape. Come on, bhoys, come on!”

And, as with every moment the combat waxed, still more fell, four “Argue-nots” clung together by the secret passage and hugged each other speechlessly.

“Say! Say!”

“I guess this squares for everything!”

“Say, if we’d spent a month trying to fix it for them!”

“Gosh, I could stay here and listen to them for a year!”

But the last two pots had been found, and it was palpably taking a chance to stay an instant longer. Bud and Jack began to let themselves down into the Twenty-footer. “Chase it, now, fellows, we’ll have to put!”

It was palpably taking a chance. But Tools and Booky took it. They had their bows in their hands. By this time the

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position of the combatants — locked inextricably together at the bottom of the bowl in one great threshing clump — could be made out by the ear almost with the accuracy of vision. It was low-down; it was cruel, vindictive — piling Pelion on Ossa! But it was a temptation not to be resisted. And unlimbering their ashen battery, Booky and Tools sent in a series of repeated and Parthian good-bys!

“Ugh!”

“Larry Gilligan!”

“Yiss! Oh-h yiss! I was on’y waitin’ fer that! An’ pretind, ye redskin, — pre-tind ye’re not all colleagued thegither now!”

But Jack had Booky by the ankle, and was hauling him into the boat by main force. And in ten seconds more they had cast off.

A dozen strokes brought them abreast of Golden Hill. They passed the bottle-neck and Tiger’s Tail. Dimly above them they

OUT OF THE LABYRINTH

could make out the old “grand-daddy of pines” and the crow’s-nest. And high and dire the noise of conflict still surged out to them. Whipping on, they plunged into the labyrinth. Instinct alone seemed to take them through. And, as if further to guide them, the moon had begun to come out from behind those thickly banking clouds. Clear of the last rush bed and overhanging cedar, they were in the lake again. Then, pulling with that uplifting strength that can be given only by victory, they steered their course straight for the boom and shanties.

It was only, in fact, after they had let themselves go for the first rip-rushing mile or more, that they would lie back for a moment and give the intoxication of their spirits a still more satisfying vent:

“We’ve got to let them have it, you know.”

“Have what? — Oh! Oh, sure!”

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“Well, rather! Those arrows were only half a good-by.”

And then: “One! Two!”

“Camp — *Cots!*

Tent! — *Pots!*

Grub? — *Lots!*

We're the ancient order

Of the *Argue-nots!*”

“Oh! I guess they could pretty near hear that, maybe!”

“They'll have more than the moon to put them right about things now.”

They gave it again when they began to pass the lower Reservation shore. And again, when another ten minutes of pulling had brought them in sight of the boom at last and the portaging place in front of the shanties, and Jack had jumped from the bow to the rough mud-and-log landing, in pure, uncontrollable exhilaration they gave it a third time:

“Camp — *Cots!*

Tent! — *Pots!*

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Grub? — *Lots!*

We're the — ”

The proverb which counsels us not to “holler” till we're entirely out of the woods should undoubtedly be extended to small bodies of fresh water. The last line died in their larynxes. For, from the door of the nearest shanty, half-dressed, his head swathed in towels, a boundless, virulent amazement in his every gesture, and in his hands the shanty duck-gun, tumbled Jombateest!

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE BOOM ONCE MORE

IOMBATEEST it was. And if that fat and bellowing cook had that night remained behind as an invalid, it was overwhelmingly evident that he had no intention of playing the part of an invalid now. Jack could only leap aboard again. And the others, yawing the Twenty-footer to the right-about, could do no more than get her back and out of the inlet with what speed they could.

There had been other painful situations in those last three days which had seemed to develop suddenly. But this!

It was impossible, now, to go back to Port Arthur. It was no less impossible to follow out their plan of making for the Reservation. For, from up the lake already

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there came to them — distant as yet, but all too clear — the roar of awakened and bursting pursuit.

In the sheer necessity of action, not in any belief that action could be of use to them, they had kept on along the boom. But once out of range of that double-barrel, they let their oars drop in complete abandonment.

“No! No! Further!”

It was Ninny who spoke. They were the first words, indeed, that he had uttered since he had found and brought them back the Twenty-footer. And the Four felt their hearts start in them as they heard. For it was truly as if it was a new Ninny that then found voice! But there was no time to think of such things now.

“No! No! Further!” Ninny hoarsely said again. He was like a man who is bewildered by himself. A flood of old river knowledge had come whirling back to him, he knew not whence. But, grasping the

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side of the boat, he still pointed on toward midstream.

And, without reasoning themselves, and under a sort of hypnotic compulsion, they spread their oars and headed on again.

A second gesture from Ninny could not be misread. Heaving to, they let the Twenty-footer go with the current to the boom. And, as another spruce-gang yell came down to them, Ninny jumped like a raftsman to that slippery, half-flattened log beside them, and ran along it to the sixteen-inch chain which bound it to the next. There he turned, grasped the staple, and let himself straight down into the river!

He let himself down till only his head was above water. But immediately, with a shake of disappointment, he drew himself as strongly up and to the boom again. Running the length of the log ahead, he caught the next connecting chain: a second time he dropped into the current till he all but disappeared! Staring and dumb,

THE BOOM ONCE MORE

the boys poled the Twenty-footer after him. . . .

Again Ninny had obviously failed to find what he was seeking. It seemed no less obvious, too, that he was trying for the bottom. But what did that explain?

Yet he was already trying for it again — this time three logs further down. And there, where the river should have been its deepest, it showed itself to be little above his waist. He was standing on a mid-channel shoal of boulders.

And once more, too, before the boys could get any first conception of what his idea was, he had gone under. But now, when he came up, it was with a “hard-head” as big as a firkin. And heaving it shoulder high, he slid it ponderously to that flat-topped boom! Waiting only to get it balanced, his great body dropped down again in groping search for a second.

And, on the instant, despite all wisdom, the Four broke into a shout themselves.

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There was no need of any explanation now! Half a dozen such boulders would sink those two boom-logs beside them till their ends were under water, and the connecting chain would no longer catch even the Twenty-footer's keel. She would go through like the threading of a needle!

She would make her passage so, if the pursuers gave her time for it. But, now, high up the wavering moon-path, the boys could see the first *chaloupe*. Almost at the same minute, too, her crew made out their position by the boom. And, with a yell, both *chaloupes* lifted themselves together, and came on anew at a pace to tear out rowlocks and crack the thwarts. Ninny had now got his fourth rock up.

"Can't I — can't I get into it, too?" breathed Jack, in torture.

"Or me?"

"Or me?"

Ninny only spurted water thickly, and shook his streaming, shaggy head, and went

THE BOOM ONCE MORE

down again. And, in point of fact, not one among the Four but would have had to struggle merely to keep his feet against that thrusting, dragging current, let alone to bring up any boulders that could have been of use. Ninny heaved his fifth up, and his sixth.

They got the Twenty-footer around, and sent her, nose on, at the opening. But that deep sailing keel of hers still caught. They could only hold her pointed so, and wait. Had those Reservationer canoes taken part in the pursuit, the thing would already have been settled.

Jombateest, who had been rolling his fat body about in a paroxysm of triumph on the landing, now seemed suddenly to begin to understand — to begin to understand, and to fill with nameless gripping doubts. Again he broke into frantic bel-lowings; and this time he began to fire his gun.

But the boys were well beyond the reach

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of *it*. The shot pattered into the water to the stern, splashing harmlessly. Could only those two *chaloupes* have been as impotent! And the Twenty-footer still held fast, barely a yard of her through and clear.

Ninny looked over his shoulder. And they could see in his eyes what they felt in their souls, it was too late to do more with boulders. Their blood seemed to stop with their breath. And then Tools, past master of ideas, had one which he should have had long minutes before. He pitched himself leaping over the bows, and, still holding to the painter, dropped in on the down-stream side of that opposing chain. In a moment Jack, seizing the idea, had followed him. The sudden, answering lift from the lightened weight carried the lunging boat another two feet through.

By now the first of the *chaloupes* was near enough for them to distinguish the voices in her. And high over all came the exhortations of Irish Mike. "Quit yer

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bull-bellowin', I tell ye, an' pull. They got it up their sleeves to slip us yit. Pull, ye fools! Pull! Pull! Pull!"

"You chaps stay in and steer," shouted Jack, in a strangle of excitement. And, he on the one side, Tools on the other, and Ninny setting his herculean triceps almost underneath, they put their whole united strength to it. The beautiful craft rose, hesitated, rose again, and then came through as if on oil!

Jack, still on her starboard, and Tools on her port, balanced each other as they tumbled sloshingly in over the gunwales. Ninny, knowing his weight, came over the stern.

At that moment, the first *chaloupe* arrived. Her yard-wide hulking nose struck the boom with a smash which toppled half those "hard-heads" back into the river, and shot every second oarsman neck and crop over his seat into the bilge. The other *chaloupe*, for her part, made a des-

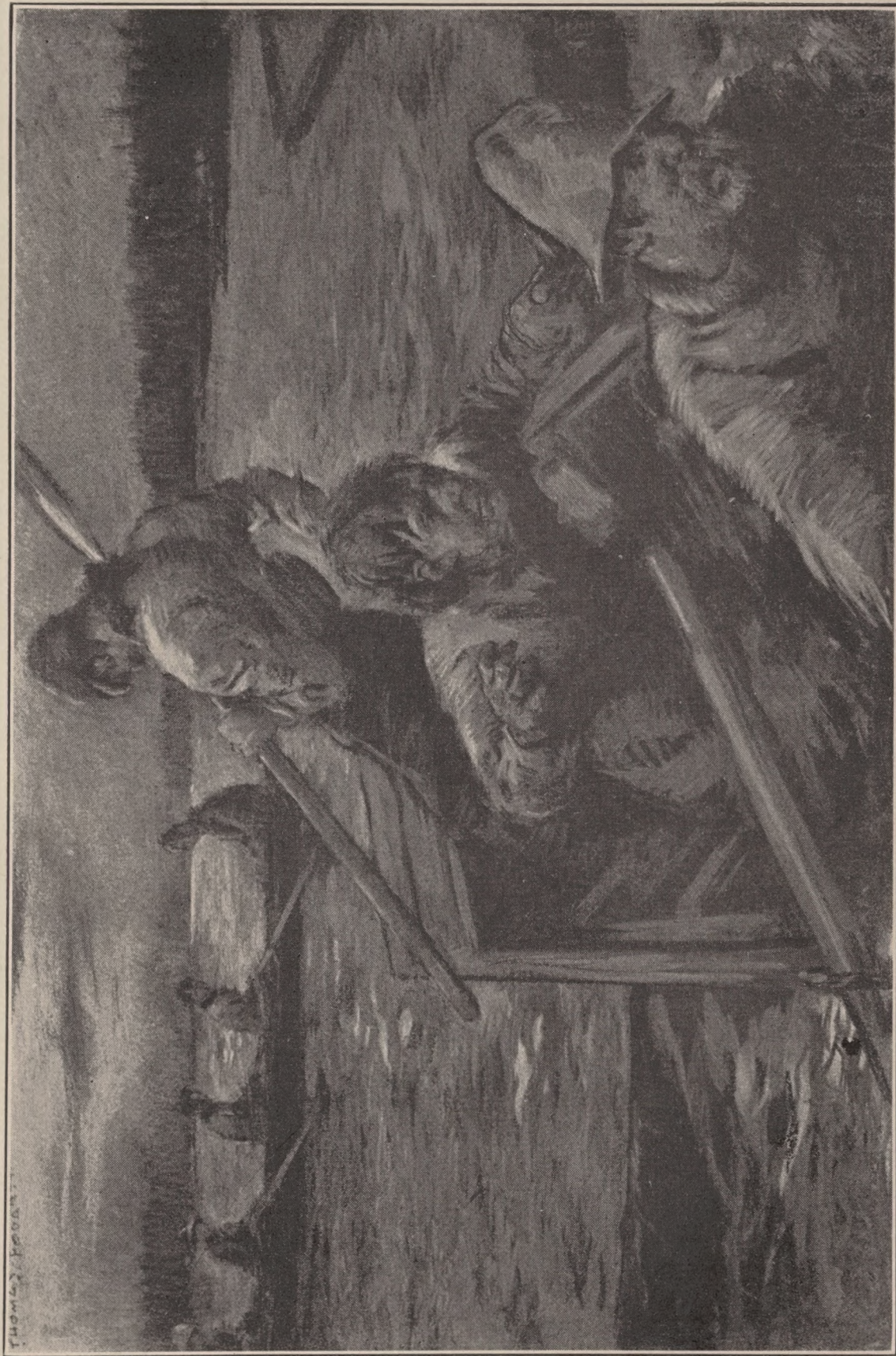
GREAT BEAR ISLAND

perate, last-minute attempt to put about. As a result, the first got it again from her. And in her turn half the crew of that second *chaloupe* piled up together in the scuppers.

But whether they sat in the bilge or kept to the thwarts, at the sight of the Twenty-footer on the other side of the boom, it may be said with truth that in the case of a certain rampaging gang of North Woods spruce cutters, mere words were of avail to them no longer!

“I’m afraid,” said Jack, — and the Four even backed up a little for purposes of conversation, — “I’m afraid you may have to go in by the shanties and portage. Somebody seems to have left something in the way.”

“Thank ye!” Irish Mike was polite to the last. “Thank ye!” he responded with unction, and felt feelingly of the back of his head. “Now that ye call me attintion to it, I do seem to see somethin’ lyin’ along.



“Somebody seems to have left something in the way.” PAGE 248.

THE BOOM ONCE MORE

An' gobs, if ye'd only troubled to let us know in time that ye had a flyin' machine, maybe we cud 'a' notified the gover'ment an' had the obstruction removed."

And then, as if her cedar heart told her that no craft this side of Wantebec could catch her now, the Twenty-footer reached forward in a long leap, and started on her run down-river.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

DOWN-RIVER

THERE is no great story to be told about the remainder of that first night. They covered almost ten miles before they halted. And they did not even make a fire. They dragged themselves out of the Twenty-footer, pulled her up, spread their blanket sleeping-bags where the ground seemed to be softest, and slept like the rocks around them till the sun was high.

Then, before they thought of breakfast, they put another good five miles behind them. They might seem to be far enough below the spruce shanties and the Reservation by now, but they wanted to feel absolutely sure. Once they were so, they began to think of breakfast in earnest.

DOWN-RIVER

And then they had a chance to realize just what their commissariat was.

There were five of them. Ahead of them was a week's journey; and to do it they had precisely twenty-seven pilot biscuits, and between two and three pounds of flour, with a few handfuls of salt, which, through everything, had remained in two of the lockers of their boat. They had not even their trolling lines and fishing-rods. As for the Twenty-two, which had provided food before, it had terminated its usefulness, though with all honors, in the hands of Jombateest. And let it be said at once that the diary of that week's run down-river was the chronicle of a hunger which grew, and whetted itself, and hourly intensified until at times it became something which made cannibalism seem one of the easiest things in the world.

The first day, however, Ninny's bow began to get them gray squirrels. And the first evening Bud decided to make

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some dumplings. They were making their squirrels into a stew, and that suggested it to him. With his mother no stew was complete without them. There was this about dumplings, too, he said: they might look mighty small in the dough, but as soon as they were in the pot they began to swell. They showed a lot of bulk, and filled you up, and that was the kind of grub they were needing just at present.

But Bud's dumplings didn't work out like that. As a stirring bowl he had nothing to use but the tin locker the flour had been in, and he seemed to have mixed in too much water. By the time he had let it stand on the fire awhile, it had thickened up all right, but a good deal of ashes had got in. And when at last he had got his flour into balls, its color wasn't right. It would have been fine for putty; but it was a good deal off hue for dumplings. However, he began to put them in, though he didn't put all of them in at once, be-

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cause, as he explained again, what with their expansion they'd shove everything else out of the pot, once they had begun to rise.

They didn't shove anything else out of the pot, and they didn't even rise! And when no one was able to wait any longer for the squirrel part of the stew, he sharpened a stick and speared one of them out and examined it. On the outside it was of a kind of greasy slipperiness. In the inside you could take a guess whether it was cooked or not; but it looked just as putty-like as when it had gone in. Bud alone ate any of them; and when asked how they tasted, he refused to answer.

It was a bad night altogether for Bud. And the first part was bad for all of them.

They had no tent now, of course. They hadn't gone to any great bother in pitching camp, and shortly before twelve it began to rain. The only thing to do was to carry up the Twenty-footer, take everything out

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of her, turn her over, prop her up face down with sticks and foot-rests, and get under. That gave them a roof over their heads, at any rate. But Jack said, unhappily, that he'd like to have had a roof over his feet, as well. Meanwhile the rain came down harder and harder.

Two minutes of lying flat convinced all concerned that that was not the proper posture. First, as Jack had discovered, there was no room for the legs if the head and shoulders were to be in shelter; secondly, the ground was now distressingly mushy, and every moment it was becoming more so; thirdly, the position in general was horribly cramping.

Tools began to draw in his knees, but to turn over he had to hump up like a rising camel. His back caught one of the seats. And the Twenty-footer, uncertain enough on its supports at best, swung half around and shot forward about ten feet!

When, at length, they had got under

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again, "Ah, say, Jack," groaned Bookie, "I haven't got room for both your feet in my ear. Couldn't you stick one of them into somebody else's, only for a minute or two?"

Tools was now using his head as a roof-tree, with the middle seat resting heavily on the back of his neck. "Say," he said, "there aren't enough of us in here. Don't you think, if we advertised, we could get some boarders?"

"The fire's going down. If anybody had any self-sacrifice in him, he'd get out and —"

The response came with electrifying suddenness. Emitting a shriek that seemed to make the Twenty-footer jump, herself, and with one wild kick and double plunge which shot her forward and down upon Tools' occipital bone, Bud flung himself out from under.

Eating dumplings such as he had eaten might explain much. But it was hardly

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explanation enough for this. "Gosh, Buddy, what's the matter? What's —"

He stood a moment, jerking and shuddering. Then, with another shriek, he threw up his arms and legs, and started in a kind of delirious jumping-jack movement around the hissing fire.

"Jinks, he's got a fit, or something." And they all began to get themselves fearfully out from under.

"Oh, take it out!" Bud yelled, "Take it out!" And manifestly he was not referring to dumplings. He had got down on all fours, by then, too, and was apparently trying to butt holes into the ground. Then he threw a hand behind him, and clawed at the back of his neck. Finally, he tried desperately to fling his heels into the air.

"Oh," he cried, "I can't do it myself. Get hold of my feet and jerk."

Then, and then only, they began to understand. They seized his ankles, lifted

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him by main force, shook with all their strength, and a big green frog dropped from his collar. He saw it himself as it fled for its life down the bank.

“Jinks,” he said tremulously, “I — thought it was a snake!”

They piled on more wood, and got the fire into a roaring blaze again. For a while they believed they had had the last of their sleep that night. But the rain gradually stopped, their clothes dried out, and Bud got the shudders out of himself by degrees. One by one they lay down again. None of them had any desire to make further use of the Twenty-footer. And in the end they once more fell asleep.

Ninny was up before sunrise. However he found it, he located a raspberry patch, and when he came back he had an improvised birch-bark basket brimming full. They were a trifle wet and soggy. But they meant breakfast. And with so much at least to say grace over, they set forth

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again. What were they going to have for dinner and supper? Pilot biscuits, if they had to eat them. But they knew that they must not begin to break in on them save as a last resource. And they had begun to put faith in Ninny as a provider. It was with good reason. That night he provided them with a porcupine stew.

He had seemed to understand from the beginning that there was a shortness in the provision train. Jack showed him exactly what they had, so that, when he was cut down to half rations with the rest of them, he might not misunderstand. But he needed no showing. To tell the truth, for the last three years Ninny's whole life had been one almost unbroken experience of short rations; with him, such a condition had come to be almost a matter of course. But it was an experience which had taught him to keep his eyes constantly open to every chance to fill the larder.

There were the four of them to row.

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They were going with the current now. And, following Doctor Gordon's instructions, they had simply made a place for Ninny in the stern, giving him nothing to do but fill it with a mind at peace. But, from the first moment, he had kept that redoubtable bow of his beside him. And never for a moment did he cease to watch river and shore ahead. On that second day down they were just about to swing in and make camp, when he gave a sort of tongue click. It brought them up with the oars poised.

He pointed straight down towards a little bay. They saw nothing there, but at the sparkle that snapped under his shaggy brows they dropped in the oars again, and pulled for all there was in them. Another low click brought them to a halt again. And now, as they craned about to port, they could make out something just backing up from the stony beach.

Ninny was fitting arrow to thong. In-

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deed, they all of them tried to get at their bows. And the drift of the boat was bringing them every moment nearer. Yet they were still so far away that for all they knew the creature might have been an otter, or even a wolverene — if any wolverene would have remained so long.

But it was a porcupine, and now it had seen them, and at once it began to move more quickly. Jack swung the Twenty-footer around so that they could shoot clear. There was a z-zipp! Ninny's first bolt had sped already.

According to all the stories, when Robin Hood used his long bow, he took aim deliberately; he even made calculations as to wind and trajectory. Ninny did not shoot like that. His first arrow was still cutting the air when another was following it. And the first kicked up the gravel just below the beast. What the actual distance was, the Four could not have said. But not one of their arrows even arrived on

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shore. The porcupine started to run, and Ninny's second arrow pinged a few inches to the right of it. He simply caught his shafts from across his knee, and again and again threw up the bow, and, if he aimed at all, it must have been in an eye-flash. His third landed where the beast had been an instant before. The fourth tumbled it head over heels. But again it was up and running. The Four sat spellbound. The range was three times what it had been in the keep. And, even there, he had never done shooting like this. Yet his arrows were following each other as fast as he could bend the hickory. The fifth turned the animal again, and the sixth killed it as if with a half-ounce ball. In fact, good rifle-shooting itself could not have done much better.

The little bay where that porcupine had been drinking with results so fatal to itself offered a very good camping ground. And they stayed there for the night. They

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made up their minds to do a little more towards making themselves snug than they had the night before. They got to work, with their jack-knives and the hand-ax, to build a windbreak with overhang enough to give them shelter. And Ninny retired a little way up the beach with his knife and the porcupine. He seemed to take it for granted that it was his place to do all jobs of that kind.

The one cooking pot they had brought down with them would plainly not be big enough; so they decided to use another of those tin lockers. They took the biggest one the Twenty-footer had to offer. It wasn't the shape of any commonplace kitchen utensil. It had three flat sides and one round. And it was a great deal larger than most kitchen utensils, if you except wash-boilers. But, again, size was what they wanted. It would be the first really satisfying meal they'd had in days. Any smaller pot would have been nowhere at all.

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They had the pot, and now Ninny came back with the porcupine; it might just as well have been rabbit, only, thank providence, it was bigger. And when they had taken it for granted that salt would be the only added ingredient, Jack had an inspiration and proposed a flavoring of sassafras. Sassafras sounded good, and enough went in to season an elephant stew.

Few people have eaten porcupine, and few have eaten stewed sassafras. And, to be truthful about it, whether it was the sassafras that flavored the porcupine or the porcupine that flavored the sassafras, it wasn't like anything any of the Four had ever tasted previously. But they ate it. They licked the last bone. And they had a struggle to bring themselves to leave a little of the broth to start the next day upon. They had already learned that raspberries, for breakfast and dinner both, are a trifle lacking in filling qualities.

Once more they turned to and finished

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their windbreak. On that windward side of the fire there were already almost bushes enough to make it. But they bent them over by piling the weight of other spruce and cedar branches on top. They cut out the bottom ones with the hatchet, and wattled them in higher up to make the whole hold tight. Then they dragged the Twenty-footer out of the water again; but this time she was going to serve only in part as a roof. They stood her on her side at an angle with the windbreak, piled logs behind her till she was as solid as a rock, and, when they had bedded down the whole inside with more spruce and cedar branches, they had something between a cave and a chimney-corner! As they made themselves comfy in a row there, too, they could look out over the whole width of the starlit river.

About ten they carried up their last armfuls of driftwood, and, opening their sleeping-bags, they spread themselves full

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length in that cozy, shell-like hollow. There was no sign of rain; they knew they would have no trouble sleeping now. Bud produced his mouth-organ — Tools had lost his long ago — and once more they had a little music. The river murmured them a lullaby.

The trouble was that they slept too well. Some time after one Jack awoke with a start and slapped wildly at his knee. A big spark had fallen on it. A little wind had blown up. But, with Ninny's help, he rolled some granite "nigger-heads" between the fire and the row of sleeping-bags; and he was turning in again, when, from somewhere far off in the bush there came out a long, faint "Yiau-yaull!" It was almost exactly like the challenging battle-cry of a tom-cat on a back fence. But it was fiercer and deeper chested.

Next minute it came again. And evidently there were two of the beasts. Ninny's eyes were glittering. Jack poked

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at Bud. "Hi, you frog hotel, wake up and get ready to be eaten alive!"

And another long chest note, much louder and nearer, made it very plain that the animals were coming straight towards them. Tools and Bookie sat up with horrified jerks, in their turn.

"Oh, it's only a tiger or two," said Jack. "What are you excited about?"

But they were all of them looking to see what Ninny was going to do. He had made for his bow again; and they immediately got their hands on their own.

They knew, of course, that they had to do either with a pair of wild cats, or with a pair of Canada lynx. The twin screeches went up again, now a great deal closer. No one not a nature-faker had ever imagined such animals attacking a camp. But every time those two hideous screams went up, four "Argue-nots" looked at each other with a creeping, cold, chill discomfort which grew in spite of them. Bookie piled more wood

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on the fire, but he didn't go far away to gather it.

"Do we heliograph for help?" asked Tools, and his grin was a trifle forced.

They tried to peer into the blackness of the bush behind them. But their eyes, blinded by the glare of the firelight, could hardly make out what lay behind the nearest tree.

Again that blood-curdling "Yiau-yiaull!"

"Fine!" said Bud. "They ought to get you lads into the choir." But he didn't even laugh himself. The beasts were now only a few hundred yards away. What were they after, anyhow? Supposing they were mad? In that case, they would attack a hundred people!

"Let's get sort of back to back, so we can watch out in every direction," said Bookie, now in a goose-flesh all over. They kept drawing their bows, and nervously slacking them off again.

"Hough! Gar-h!" This time that con-

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vulsingly horrid double snarl came from the other side of the camp. They looked to see two pairs of flickering green lamps behind the Twenty-footer. But the big cats were no longer coming straight at them. They were circling fiercely about, seemingly trying to make up their minds to get between the camp and the shore.

“Why,” said Jack, with a genuine relief, “of course it’s the remains of that porky that’s brought them down! Wherever Ninny put them, that’s their idea of an early breakfast.”

And an instant light of agreement on the face of Ninny showed that the explanation was the right one.

Apparently, too, the beasts had in the meantime circled back, passed the camp on the other side, and had now found what they were looking for. A new note began to go up from them. And once more it was precisely the same sound, or sounds, as a house cat might make when eating,

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the same deep, guzzling growls of warning at any one who might think of breaking in upon the banquet.

Ninny put up his hand, and began to slip lightly out through the shadows. Still keeping their bows ready, and stepping wherever he stepped, they followed. As their eyes began to get the fire blink out of them, they, too, could begin to see a little. At the clump of sassafrass from which Jack had flavored their supper, Ninny dropped stealthily to his knees, and commenced to work his way around. On hands and knees they followed again. And now they could see that the night wasn't really so very black after all. It was only the fire that made it seem so. Above them was a misty sprinkle of stars; in fact, they did not see how they could help being seen themselves. But it was plain that they were not. And in another moment they could make out the outlines of both animals distinctly. They were lynx, as big as bulldogs; and

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they could doubtless have handled a dozen ordinary dogs between them. Ninny made a motion towards his right; he wanted them to spread out so they might all have a chance to use the bow. They did it as quickly as they could, and then he gave his little click.

Both beasts whirled at it, their hair up and their jaws wide, and every arrow was loosed at once. How many hit they never knew. But one animal went over backwards as if throwing a flip-flap; it was probably Ninny's bolt that got him. But, next moment, scrambling to his feet with a screech that made all preceding it seem almost sweet to the ear, he followed his fellow at split-the-wind time back into the bush again.

There are certain things you can't kill with blunt-headed wooden arrows, no matter how well you may shoot. But, at any rate, it had been one more night to remember.

CHAPTER TWENTY

ALMOST THE LAST

IF any further proof had been needed that Ninny's mind had begun to come back to him, it could have been found in this. As, daily, they drew nearer and nearer home, he became more and more nervous. He had begun to remember things; and doubtless he remembered what it was that had led him to run away — the brainless cruelty which had accused the simple soul of starting the great fire in Mill Bend.

Just as that wild, fighting excitement of those last few hours in the keep had cleared his mind of half its fogs, now the steady feeling of comradeship and support was clearing away the rest. And now, as memory came back to him, he began to think of Wantebec and Mill Bend with fear. What

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awaited him there? He showed a growing dread of going any further. Save for Jack, the night they camped under the stars at Bass Island he would have slipped away and pushed miserably back for the North Woods once more. For hours Jack played the part of a little big brother to him. And it was only the constant reassurances, the repeated pats and hand-clasps of all four of them, that kept him with them to the last.

Perhaps, too, the feeling — and he must have had it — that they could hardly have got down without him, helped a little. They were on quarter rations when they weren't on half; and it was Ninny who provided the supplies for that. Twice he caught a "big-mouth," or channel bass, by "groping." He stood in deep water for the better part of an evening, as motionless as the old snag he was holding to; but he was successful in the end. He shot more squirrels. There weren't many along

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the river. But it is safe to say that none that once came within range of that bow of his ever got away from him. He knocked them out of tree-tops when the boys could hardly see them. By the time they had passed the West Branch they could shoot pretty well themselves. But it was almost always Ninny who brought home the food. And when, in the heat of midday they lay up on shore, and the Four were giving themselves a rest which they felt they couldn't have kept up the pace without, Ninny would invariably be hunting up the nearest raspberry patch, and adding to the larder from it. If you want to learn just how much provender is needed to sustain life in even a partial degree of happiness, just make yourself one of five who have been set the task of rowing a hundred miles, with or against the current, with practically nothing in your boat at the beginning.

Generally they had stews, because, as pointed out already, you're always sure

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of getting the most out of anything when you stew it. But one night, when they had made an unusually big squirrel-killing, they tried the method of cookery invented by men who work in lime-kilns. They took five of their squirrels, dressed and salted them, wrapped them in basswood leaves, and rolled the whole in balls of blue clay, which could be had almost anywhere along the shore. Then, working those little clay ovens just under the surface of the sandy beach, they made their fire above them. The length of time they had to wait was a great trial. But when the time did come, they had a dinner well worth waiting for. As Bookie said, he didn't think they'd be hungry again — till next morning.

While making Half Mile Carry they saw partridges; but they got none of them, and they prepared for their last day's run. Ahead of them was the gleaming blue of Eleven Mile Lake. It was almost like

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home water now. And lying at the end of the portage was something that fairly suggested civilization — a perfectly new wash-board spoon, and a linen-twist troll, at least sixty yards of it. Some fishing party had lost it; and such things belong to those who find them.

“We’ve had our luck in Eleven Mile,” said Tools, “but we might as well drop it in on chance.”

It was a very hot day. The afternoon was far spent, and whereas they had been able to sail coming up, now what little wind there was, was against them. To add to that they had gradually been taking reefs in their belts, until, by now, there were moments when they felt that it was only those belts that held them together. Ninny took one pair of oars and rowed, and they were glad enough of that help. He had put away his bow; you can’t shoot anything in the middle of a lake. And they were rather wobegonely arguing the question of

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trying to make Wantebec that night, by lying up for an hour or so, and doing the rest after dusk, when their argument came to an end.

Whoosh! What had happened in that same place a month before was going to happen again! *Smack! Poomph!*

“Oh, Jemima!” And fifty feet behind them, hooked clean, the very leviathan of lunges shot fiercely into the air. He curved his five-foot length into a glittering mackerel-gray rainbow, and, striking the water broadside, plunged for the bottom! He was bigger, there was no doubting it, than their first!

“Cæsar!” said Tools. “He’s no fish at all. He’s an alligator!”

Jack had grasped the oars again, and to ease the tension was backing water.

A really big muskellunge is the scourge of the dark green deeps in which he lurks. Wo to the perch or sunfish or bass that passes the waving, weedy ambush where

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he lies! Even his own offspring keep to the shallows till they are too big to tempt those gray-wolf jaws. And, once again, when he comes to the hook, it is not his bull-like strength which amazes the fisherman, but his pure ferocity of temper. When that long, protruding under jaw has closed upon something which it can neither swallow nor let go, the giant pike seems to gasp for a moment unbelievably, then to go crazy with rage. It is not pain. The callouses on a ditcher's palms are not more insensible to the pins he will stick through them than the sinew and bone plates of a 'lunge's mouth are to the barbs of the trolling spoon. If he breaks away once, he will often grab at the glittering "wash-board" again not five minutes afterwards, and be hauled in at last with the marks from his former experience still ragged upon his jaws.

The story of that second fish-fight cannot be told at length. As in the first, they all

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had a chance to hold the line against the monster, and in turn they all had enough of it. Ninny took hold at last, and the brunt of the battle fell upon him. At times, with straining knees, he braced himself against a dead, stubborn, unbroken pull that lasted for two minutes. Then, as the pressure eased for a moment, — though my lord *lucius* had merely turned savagely on his course again, — Ninny was able to get in a few yards of welcome slack. But, an instant later, as the brute went off in a headlong rush that mocked at all resistance, that slack was swiftly lost again; or, changing tactics, the fish would sound, and go straight down thirty feet to the bottom like a pig of lead. Ninny, chuckling grimly, held to it, and the others felt the sweat come out on them anew, even from watching it.

Yet, in those minutes, the air itself was growing strangely cool; and, when next the boat went about to starboard, all four

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boys found themselves staring at the sky. The whole east had become one wide, blue-black ink blot. And over everything it was as if a pall of deathly quiet had been lowered.

“Jinks, I guess we’d better be making for shore.”

“What, and lose our fish?”

“We’ll be taking a chance if we stay.”

“How long is it going to take now, Ninny, do you think?”

Again their fish jumped, the whole five feet of him, by way of answer. He was good for another hour of it.

A deep growl of thunder came muttering across the lake. And the very shallowness of these fresh-water northern lakes makes them very dangerous. A sea can blow up in a matter of minutes, almost of seconds.

“We’d better put for shore,” said Jack again. “We can tow him after us, if he’ll tow; if not, we’ll have to let him go.”

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“Aw, rats! We can risk it for another minute or so, anyway.”

But that pall of silence and blackness had become like nightfall. And now it began to be fitfully lighted up by a swift succession of those sickly and uncertain lightning flickers which herald the hurricane! Below, it was blacker and blacker. Above, it was fringed with the swiftly traveling gray that means wind and rain together.

There was no time to make shore now, even had they been wise enough to change their minds. Ninny rapidly knotted the line about a thwart. If the fish was held, well and good; if not, he could go, and welcome! Bookie, at his end of the boat, could hardly see Tools, who had been steering. And, next moment, they got it, in one shattering crash, and a white glare that brought out every rush and tree now bending under the wind that followed.

The surface of the lake flattened, then lifted itself into waves that seemed to fling

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themselves after one another. The Twenty-footer was shipping water by the pailful before Ninny could get her under way. Jack, crawling forward, took the other pair of oars. The drenching rain was nothing compared with the spray that whipped them, sheet on sheet. Even if it had been possible to speak, they could not have heard each other. Tools, at the rudder lines, held her with the wind. If they had got into the trough, they would have been over in a moment. The question was, could they get anywhere before they had filled up now? Once swamped, there would be no chance at all. The best swimmer in the world can't do anything when the water is being thrown over his head. The lightning itself was danger enough; yet now they hardly thought of that. They were all of them pale and silent. Bookie and Bud began to bail. They might almost as well have sat doing nothing.

For the barest trice Ninny took his eyes

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from his oars, his glance swept the whole scene, and then, as if with his chin, he pointed towards the very center of the lake!

He wanted them to swing off in that direction. And there, as the lightning showed them, there seemed to be nothing but whitecaps. Yet that was what he meant! And he was already getting an angle on the water by putting all his giant strength behind his right oar.

But for the fact that he had shown them how true his instincts were so many times already, this was a case where they could never have followed him. It seemed certain death; and as it was, Tools, gasping at the rudder lines, hesitated for a moment; he looked at Bud. Bud nodded whitely, and their steersman hauled her off to port and let Ninny give all his strength to pulling the oars.

Twice they were so nearly troughed that only the pure seagoing qualities of the Twenty-footer brought them back keel

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down. But if Ninny thought the best place was the center of the lake, he could have it. Tools set his right arm against the port line and kept it there. There seemed mighty little chance of them ever getting out of it alive in any case.

They were none of them ever to forget the next five minutes. They were so nearly swamped — the Twenty-footer was so full — that they really *were* swamped when they arrived. Then they realized the truth: they were in shoal water, on one of the big sand-bars they had found on the way up! All they had to do was to tumble out, and, standing knee-deep, hold the Twenty-footer where she was till the blow was over.

When they had thought or leisure in their thankfulness to remember something else, they found that the 'lunge had come along with them. The line caught about Jack's legs and almost upset him. He felt down into the bottom of the boat, got

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hold of the hatchet, and gave the monster the *coup de grâce* before he began once more to bail.

. Another half hour, and they were safe ashore.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

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IF you have ever learned what it means to acquire a real hunger, you will know that the first meal at home, or even the first five or six, can merely take the edge off it. A hunger it has taken a week to acquire is something that can be worn down and got safely under control only by day after day of unrelaxing thought and application. In a word, you have almost to live in the pantry.

In the case of those four "Argue-nots" they were still eating, with only a pause now and then for less important things, when, some two weeks after their homecoming, a party arrived from those shanties at Loggers' Inlet. It consisted of Irish Mike, Cash-down, Jombateest, and two other Frenchmen; and late that night

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they all gloomily boarded a box car for the west. And for the big Irishman, at any rate, there was, in the hearts of the Four, a kind of unacknowledged fondness and regret. They saw him only from across the street. He wagged a comprehensive hand at them, and feelingly pointed to his head. "Gobs," he said, "I can hang me hat on it annywheres yit!" Again, be it set down, he was a man capable of better things. And, indeed, we have some reason for believing that when the Four were next to have word of him, the news was of the sort one likes to hear.

As additional evidence that boss Hallelwell was again in control, with Uncle Billy McLeash's next trip south there came down the "Argue-not" tent and campstove. And, before the snow flew, the Club saw them stowed away in big new private lockers of their own.

To the Club, too, as a special gift, went Ninny's famous bow, where it is now the

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central and chiefmost trophy. About those club-room walls four other bows had likewise been suspended; and each was surrounded by its blazon of arrows, which arrows, though they are of the most ordinary and amateurish make, seem to possess a potency for the revival of Lunge Lake memories that bids fair to last forever.

Yet, hanging even higher in affection, may also be seen the once more repaired and readjusted Twenty-two. It must be said, however, that the logic of that Port Arthur experience was against having that small, much-suffering weapon touched at all. For — and the thought was one to hold — it had shown its highest value when it was dangerous only to him who attempted to make use of it! Might not much be done towards the discouragement of actual war (we mean, of course, the great and glorious sort, with the gold lace and epaulets and military bands), if it were well understood in advance that every

GREAT BEAR ISLAND

time a man pulled the trigger of a magazine rifle, or gave the word for the firing of a twelve-inch gun, he would himself, by way of distinction and as an inevitable first result, lose a nose, or an ear at least?

Considering that the treasure-trove from that Great Bear Island mound was so far beyond even Bookie's dreams, it was only natural and befitting that the boys should go with it to Major Maggs and tell him frankly that it really belonged to him. It was no less natural and befitting that the major, with a single magnificent gesture, should wave such a thought a thousand miles away. "But if," and he made the suggestion only to ease their minds, "if, when they came to arrange and set up those pots, axes, arrowheads, *et cetera*, in their already admirable museum, they should care to distinguish them by some such label, say, as 'From the Maggs Presentation,' he could, of course, offer no insuperable objection to that. . . .

THE LAST

Furthermore, far from being in the slightest degree astonished by the results of the expedition, he would merely recall — and possibly his words would now contain a significance somewhat greater than they had had before—that upon the occasion of their departure, he had, in a word, clearly predicted the discoveries they had made.

“And, gentlemen,” — by this time the major’s hands were once more in the very strongest alliance beneath his coat-tails, — “and, gentlemen, when there has been established upon those upper Wantebec islands that northwestern Chautauqua which I have with no less certitude foreseen, it will afford me some slight gratification, both as a man, an American, and a citizen of the world, to set aside that particular island upon which these epoch-making discoveries have been made as a small, but I trust not wholly invaluable, contribution to the demesne of our national parks!”

G R E A T B E A R I S L A N D

There were those who said that the opportunity to make a speech like that was worth the contents of an island to the major at any time. They were the same people who inquired of the doctor what he was going to do with Ninny, now that he had got him back.

The doctor had already decided that. With the judge assisting, he refurnished Ninny's old shack on Hunter's Point. He gave it as his medical opinion that they could do no better than get Ninny back into it and among his Lares and Penates again at once. And there, in all happiness, he may now be found. Once more he has his old gum-box "skeps" of bees, and his nets, and traps, and fish-lines. Probably he will never attain to that strength of intellect which we feel to be so necessary in this world of guile. But it must be remembered that he did not possess it when he ran away.

Nor has Wantebec yet bestowed any

THE LAST

medal upon Ninny as its most valuable citizen. Wherefore, and because of that, he must have come to the conclusion that, like the major, he belongs in the class of "citizens of the world." In any case, his actions are certainly those of a man who feels himself in debt to all the world. When any of the hapless mill-folk across on the Bend need help which they cannot possibly pay for, — when there are movings to be made, or stoves to be put up, or drift logs to be hauled in, to Ninny — or Dinny, as he has been re-christened now — do they make recourse. And being the large and simple scatter-brain he is, he goes with them beamingly, and puts forth all his strength, and serves them joyously and with pride!

THE END

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